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Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of Equatorial Guinea, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your outstanding election to guide our work during the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly and, through you, to pay a well-deserved tribute to your country, the Republic of Namibia. My country subscribes to the generally held view that your well-known diplomatic skills and broad experience will contribute to the success of our work.

We also warmly congratulate the new Member States, Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga, on their admission to the great family of the United Nations. This is a great victory for the principles of free expression and self-determination of peoples and nations. That is the only way to enrich the democratic nature of the United Nations with the diversity and universality of mankind.

It is with optimism and hope that we participate in this session of the General Assembly. We reaffirm our full commitment to the purposes and principles that were the basis for the establishment of the world Organization. We believe that its more than 50 years of existence, which have made their mark on the twentieth century and have helped bring about great social, political, economic and technological changes, constitute a positive legacy for the future of mankind.

We have high hopes for this session because those long years of experience and the fact that we are about to enter the third millennium mean that we can talk of a United Nations jubilee for the new era, in which mankind should fully benefit from our achievement of the goals and ideals of a world of peace, free from war and conflict. We want all men and women to be able to enjoy their most inalienable rights — to freedom, dignity and equality — and we want all the world's nations and peoples to live in justice and equity. Ultimately, we want all human beings, without distinction and without discrimination, to enjoy the benefits of economic, social and cultural progress.

But in spite of these long years of history, the end of the cold war, our long experience and the many events that have taken place in this half-century process —

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advances in the new technologies of space exploration, atomic science, remote sensing and other progress that is of incalculable value for the future of mankind — we note with concern that we have yet to guarantee peace and security for all nations.

That is why we must adopt strategies and measures that will enable developing countries to take advantage of their opportunities for progress and that will make it possible for all people to enjoy the best possible living conditions on this, our home planet. We must make sure that, as our common heritage, education, science and technology reach all people so that human development can enable them to enjoy their rights to dignity and responsibility. We must examine our consciences and understand that it is we ourselves who are slowing the advance of human progress.

The desire for power and world hegemony, exacerbated by extremism, ethnic and racial discrimination and intolerance and fanaticism born of political beliefs and theories, has created a climate of war, terror and insecurity in many parts of the world and could unleash a new world confrontation. The most striking examples of this may be seen in the situations in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, as well as in the recent escalation of violence in South-East Asia.

Moreover, despite the demands of third-world countries and the attempts to establish a new world economic order that would be more just and equitable for all, the present unjust economic system continues to prevail, impeding trade between the North and the South. We must realize that the economic situation is an irreplaceable element of the balance of domestic and international peace and security: peace does not mean the mere absence of hostilities; it is a state of perfect harmony in human life in the economic, social, cultural and moral spheres. For Africa and for the Africans, political idealism can flourish only if it is attended by concrete action that will guarantee human survival and justify the aims of that idealism. Let us not forget that political idealism of any kind is based on a culture appropriate to the population in question. Here, human beings are the raw material, and the proper conditions must be present for the success of that kind of ideal political system. Hence, so long as the peoples of Africa suffer from hunger, poverty, war and pandemic disease, and so long as they are overwhelmed by cultural deficiencies, ignorance and illiteracy, efforts to democratize their States and ensure peace will always fail.

It is said that an empty sack cannot stand by itself. Africa needs economic inputs, technology transfer for development, and recognition of its cultural and moral values, so that internecine struggle will cease and so that democracy and political theories will be employed in the most objective way.

That is why Central African heads of States members of the Economic Commission of Central African States and of the Central African Economic and Monetary Commission, meeting at Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, from 23 to 26 June 1999, carefully studied all these factors and adopted, *inter alia*, strategies to prevent conflict in the region. They decided to establish a subregional parliament, a peacekeeping force and an institute for the promotion and defence of human rights. We hope that the United Nations will support these decisions.

The reality is that in Africa there is strong pressure from underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy which justifies the flight of intellectuals and the current exodus of Africans to developed countries in search of a livelihood. Accordingly, we call for United Nations support for the decision adopted in Algeria by the heads of State of Africa to increase humanitarian support for the millions of African refugees, to amounts comparable to those given other regions.

This is also for me a favourable opportunity to reaffirm our solidarity with the political will and the determination of the African States to speed up the mechanisms for integration and unity, to meet the challenges of globalization in order to ensure global development for mankind. In order for political and democratic systems to succeed in Africa, the economy and economic culture should have a key role among the elements that go along with them, for otherwise they would develop without any objective basis.

Unfortunately, we find that currently there is no firm political will for cooperation between the North and South, as there was in the past. In fact, now there is just a clash of various selfish interests in which the strongest or the richest always win.

At this time we recall the great projects of economic cooperation in post-war Europe which enlivened Europe, South-East Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Attempts of the same kind have been sought for Africa with the construction of considerable infrastructure to help the peoples of this continent: for example, the

Aswan dam in Egypt, hydroelectric power stations on the Volta River in Ghana, in Inga in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Mombasa in Tanzania. Unfortunately, this political will to aid the development of the continent has not continued.

This, then, is the high price for the independence of African nations. The political development of the continent is now confronted with a number of difficulties and challenges.

First is the need to establish sincere industrial cooperation with developed countries, instead of the present merciless extraction of natural resources and their exportation as raw materials, with no compensatory exchange for technologies to process them.

Secondly, there is need to achieve fair prices in the exchange of natural resources for manufactured goods, as prices have not gone up more than 25 per cent since independence.

A third challenge is that credit is given under conditions that do not allow the population to satisfy its needs nor to profit from corresponding investments, the debt for which is mortgaging the economy.

Fourth, conditions are imposed on cooperation using political criteria that do not take into account the reality of African societies, as well as another series of conditions that funnel the benefits of the current international economic system to a powerful few.

Nonetheless, we recognize and are grateful for the decision by the seven major industrialized countries to retire the debt of developing countries. We cherish the hope this political will may spread to all donor countries and that its application will not be according to selective and exclusionary criteria.

Praiseworthy in the same way is the initiative by the Administration of the President of the United States of America to increase American investment in Africa, an initiative which we hope will be a second Marshall Plan for the African continent.

Certainly, the consequences of selfishness and of unfair distribution of available resources have created, in the developed as much as in the developing countries, frustrated groups of people who today are a cause of political and social instability in many parts of the world.

With respect to human resources, we must analyze in depth the causes of the current juvenile delinquency, organized crime, rape, kidnappings and indiscriminate killings, drug addiction and drug trafficking, alcoholism, prostitution, money laundering, counterfeiting, terrorism and corruption which exist at all social levels everywhere. All these practices challenge us and compromise the future of humanity.

Our concern is that these behaviours make up our legacy for the generations of the third millennium. Does the new epoch to which we aspire beginning in the year 2000 presuppose the rise of some and the regression to poverty and misery of others? Can international peace and security guarantee protection only for some, denying it to others?

Equatorial Guinea does not aspire to hegemony or power, yet we speak here with the conviction of the obligation that falls to us as a member of this democratic international community to ask for what is best for mankind.

Socio-political development and technological advances tell us that we are in a different galaxy from that of earlier times. The United Nations is the only Organization that has exercised leadership in the process of the world's development. Yet after 54 years, we must realize that the terms of reference of the world's current socio-political reality are not those in effect in 1945. It is clear that the United Nations is similarly undergoing changes which correspond to this moment in history, in social philosophy, mechanisms, structure and action.

Today we talk of democracy as the only way to promote the development of peoples, ensure peace and guarantee respect for human dignity. Today we talk of globalizing world politics and policies and of the governance of States because the concept of social development finds its justification only in the values of the individual. The United Nations should therefore take no action that is not in keeping with those values and is not a faithful expression of this interdependent, unipolar world that calls for unified criteria. We must make a special effort to help young people so that they can carry on the positive values of humankind for the sake of a more integrated, more developed, more just and more equitable world.

The ideal of any governments must be to seek peace, progress and prosperity for its peoples. In this connection, the efforts of the countries that are fighting

to democratize their societies be properly appreciated and supported by countries with longer democratic experience. It has been proved that penalizing governments and peoples is counterproductive and makes them unable to promote national development however much they want to. The United Nations ought to assist these countries closely in their economic, social, technical and cultural advancement, in keeping with the spirit of globalization and the actual situation in each country.

We believe that the current United Nations system is obsolete in terms both of decision-making and of the effectiveness of its actions when it comes to dealing properly with the difficulties and challenges facing its members. Indeed, the proliferation of peacekeeping operations in various parts of the world is proof that the current conflict-prevention system is obsolete.

As an organization founded on democracy, the United Nations must establish the principle across the board that all parties must be given a hearing in all bodies, including the Security Council, that take decisions affecting its Members. Moreover, the most sophisticated nuclear technology should be employed exclusively as a common shared possession to be used for the benefit of all humankind rather than as private property that benefits some to the detriment of others.

We believe that in globalizing world politics and policies, which is positive in theory in that it unifies socio-political criteria, States should nevertheless implement the philosophy by adopting specific measures that are in keeping with the specific characteristics of each country. In this connection, Equatorial Guinea has particular experience in implementing its programme of transition to a multi-party system by applying the theory of the democratic test, a way to involve the people in taking all the political decisions that affect them. As a result, our transition has been peaceful, orderly and calm because our people themselves, no one else, are responsible for the measures adopted, which all political actors must respect.

A progressive and continuous process of adaptation by the authorities and by the people themselves is needed so that they acquire the right sort of culture in which human rights and democracy can be respected. In that connection, we welcome the efforts by the Commission on Human Rights to adopt a special assistance programme for Equatorial Guinea to promote and ensure respect for human rights there.

We are party to all the human rights treaties and conventions and have adopted a wide-ranging framework of laws and regulations to protect human rights. However, the lack of infrastructure makes it difficult for the people to enjoy in full the various services to which they are entitled.

I would conclude by making clear our political resolve to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, promote close friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between all States and promote economic, scientific and technological development throughout the world. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea stands open to the world as a peaceful State that puts dialogue and negotiation first, rejecting force of any kind as a means of resolving conflicts.

We hope that the year 2000, which is almost on us, will become a milestone in establishing a world truly committed to peace, progress and prosperity for humankind.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of Lesotho

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Lesotho.

The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of Lesotho, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of Lesotho, The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Mosisili (Lesotho): I extend my sincere and warm congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth

session. It is indeed gratifying to see a distinguished statesman and son of Africa lead the Assembly, especially one whose country was born out of the crusade of the United Nations for the freedom of colonial peoples. Your personal devotion and commitment to the liberation struggle of the people of Namibia makes you eminently qualified to lead the United Nations in its search for peace. I am confident that your experience, talent and energies will ensure a successful outcome for the work of the session, and I assure you of my country's support in all your endeavours.

I also pay a well-deserved tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the excellent manner in which he discharged his duties as President of the Assembly at its last session.

To Secretary-General Kofi Annan, I extend my country's gratitude and support for his tireless efforts in the daunting task of finding lasting solutions to problems that face our Organization. We particularly commend him for his latest brave efforts in East Timor.

Permit me also to express my delegation's profound joy at seeing three States join the ranks of the Members of the United Nations. The addition of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to our Organization brings closer to fruition the hope of the international community to see the United Nations comprising all the countries of the world. We say welcome to these new Members and extend to them a hand of friendship.

I also wish to express my satisfaction with the Secretary-General's trenchant report on the work of the Organization. In particular, I concur with his analysis of the moral dilemma that faces the United Nations when the Security Council is unable to act, because of a lack of consensus, in the face of the most heinous human rights violations. In those circumstances, and while conflicts continue unabated in different parts of the world, the capacity of the international conflict-resolution machinery is put to a severe test. Perhaps no conflict has done this as intensely as the one in Kosovo.

The Kosovo crisis represented the very disturbing trend towards the most serious violations of human rights in the form of ethnic cleansing and impunity. After the experience of Bosnia, which is still so fresh in our minds, the world could not be expected to sit back and take no action. It would indeed be a sad comment on the efficacy of the United Nations if the next millennium were to begin under a cloud of tolerance of impunity in the face of acknowledged genocide and other gross violations of human rights. While it is recognized that the conflict was an internal matter of Serbia, the dilemma was whether the world could sit idly by and watch a people being exterminated.

The more difficult question that Kosovo raises is the one of the role of the Security Council in similar crises. The Charter places responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security squarely in the hands of the Security Council. That body must therefore discharge this function with seriousness and firmness. It must resist the temptation to view questions of international peace and security through the lenses of national fears and preoccupations. If it is paralyzed by parochial interests, the temptation to take unilateral action increases. The belated submission of the Kosovo issue to the jurisdiction of the Security Council is therefore very welcome, as is the United Nations involvement through its civilian administration.

In a similar vein is the tragedy that is East Timor, whose denouement seems happily to be in sight. After many years of inconclusive attempts to find a solution to the problem of East Timor, the new Government in Jakarta finally paved the way by allowing the people of that sad country to exercise their right to choose. The cruel violence that was unleashed against them, however, when they did express their preference in unequivocal terms is a source of great dismay. We are grateful, therefore, that an international peacekeeping force has now entered the country and hope that it will bring the nightmare of the people of East Timor to an end. We call on the Government of Indonesia to bring to book the perpetrators of violations of human rights. We look forward to welcoming East Timor in the councils of independent States in accordance with the wishes of its people.

The last decade of the twentieth century has been a time of momentous changes in all parts of the world, particularly in Africa, where for the first time unprecedented democratic changes and reforms have transformed the political landscape across the continent. We remain concerned, however, that the proliferation of conflicts in Africa has had a serious negative impact on our development capacities, as these conflicts have undermined efforts to improve the living conditions of our peoples and retarded progress towards Africa's economic, social and political transformation.

The situation in Angola continues to be a source of concern for the people of Africa in general and the countries of southern Africa in particular. As UNITA continues to perfect its war machine and effort, the prospects for peace have become more elusive. The people of Angola have endured hardship for more than 40 years, when the years of the civil war are added to those of a very brutal colonial war. There are millions of adults in that country who have never lived in a state of peace. Their country is richly endowed with resources, and yet these have not been harnessed for combating the many evils facing the country, but have, on the contrary, been used for prosecuting a war that has impoverished the people beyond measure.

The States of southern Africa will continue to search for a solution to the Angolan crisis. In this regard, they expect to receive the support of the international community in the form of intensified sanctions against UNITA and its leader, Mr. Savimbi, and increased humanitarian assistance for the victims of the conflict.

The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has equally been a source of concern for the countries of southern Africa since its inception, in view of its implications for the security of the region as a whole. Various efforts made under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), coordinated by President Chiluba of Zambia, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations and other interested parties, have started to bear fruit with the signing of a Ceasefire Agreement in Lusaka on 10 July 1999 by the heads of State of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The signing, finally, of this Agreement by the representatives of the rebel Congolese Rally for Democracy should help to pave the way for a permanent and peaceful solution.

On the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, we wish to commend the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Secretary-General for his untiring efforts to find a durable solution to the problem. We believe that the OAU Framework Agreement remains the only viable option for the resolution of that unfortunate conflict. We, therefore, appeal to the two parties to the conflict to implement, as soon as possible, the technical arrangements worked out by the OAU, the United Nations, Algeria and the United States.

We continue to support the United Nations efforts to hold a referendum to determine the true wishes of the people of Western Sahara and once more appeal to the Government of Morocco to assist the process and ensure its success in accordance with the will of the Saharawi people.

In Sierra Leone we welcome the ceasefire that has been arranged under the auspices of the President of Togo. However, the settlement raises some troubling questions. It is difficult to accept that those who hold grievances against a legitimately elected Government can shoot their way into power-sharing, especially when they have been accused of the most chilling atrocities, as occurred in Sierra Leone. Certainly those who are aggrieved have a right to challenge the governance of their Government, but this should be done within the limits of constitutional order and propriety. In spite of these reservations, we wish the people of Sierra Leone well and will continue to support their efforts to establish lasting peace in their country.

We also wish to congratulate the countries of West Africa under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for the sacrifices they have made to bring about peace in their neighbourhood.

Regarding Palestine, all peace-loving people dream of the day when the permanent status negotiations will commence and soon be followed by a permanent peace and a permanent State for the Palestinians. We therefore encourage the parties to the Middle East conflict to persevere in their quest for the attainment of the goal which has eluded them for so long.

The need to secure our global neighbourhood has never been greater. Unfortunately, the threat of weapons of mass destruction continues to bedevil our hopes for a peaceful world, and there does not seem to be a global determination to eliminate these weapons. This is so despite the fact that over the years this Assembly has adopted numerous resolutions on the issue of arms control and disarmament and in particular on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in different regions of the world. Unless the United Nations of the future is able to make significant progress in nuclear disarmament, it runs the risk of losing credibility as an institution dedicated to the pursuit of peace. The United Nations of the twenty-first century, therefore, should be one which can give humankind hope for a world of diminished poverty and no threat of a nuclear war.

Tomorrow, 24 September, marks the third anniversary of the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). It has long been accepted that the future credibility of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will depend on the effective implementation of the CTBT. Convinced of the need to enhance the institutional fabric of the CTBT, Lesotho deposited its instrument of ratification of the CTBT with the Secretary-General earlier this month, thus joining the steadily increasing number of States that have so far ratified the Convention. Lesotho supports the holding of the special conference on the CTBT, as envisaged under article 14 of that Treaty, with a view to accelerating its ratification.

In the midst of all these conflict situations is the dramatic and unacceptable deterioration in the level of adherence to the norms of humanitarian law as opposite sides to a conflict indiscriminately and ruthlessly employ any and all means that might advance their ends. Civilian populations have become the main targets and direct victims of fighting between hostile armies, with women and children suffering disproportionately from atrocities that include rape, sexual exploitation, murder and the mutilation of civilians.

The plight of the victims of these heinous crimes underscores the imperative for the creation of a new judicial body that would extend the rule of law in its broadest conception. Following the overwhelming endorsement by 120 nations in Rome last summer of the idea to set up an International Criminal Court, the early establishment of the Court is now a top priority. It is gratifying to see that just over a year since the conclusion of the Rome Treaty 86 States have reaffirmed their commitment to the Court by signing the Treaty, while four have already ratified it. My Government remains committed to the early establishment of the International Criminal Court and has every intention to abide by the terms of the International Criminal Court Treaty and will ratify it soon.

In his report "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", of 14 July 1997, the Secretary-General proposed the holding of a Millennium Assembly with a summit segment in the year 2000, at which heads of State and Government could "come together to articulate their vision of prospects and challenges for the new millennium and agree on a process for fundamental review of the role of the United Nations." (*A/51/950, para. 91*)

For us in the developing world, the most crucial question facing the international community is how to bridge the huge gap between the haves and the have nots of this world. Unless we redouble our efforts in this regard, our endeavours to curb such social ills as crime will be in vain. By the same token, illegal immigration in search of better living conditions elsewhere, which is the direct consequence of economic inequalities, will continue to increase. It behooves us all, therefore, to treat the problem of poverty with all the seriousness it deserves, and this fact must be reflected in the deliberations during the millennium summit.

The Economic and Social Council deserves our congratulations for highlighting the problem during both its high-level and operational activity segments this year. Of course, the problem of poverty has received United Nations attention on several occasions, most prominently during the social summit of 1995 in Copenhagen, when the target of halving absolute poverty by the year 2015 was agreed. Nevertheless, the problem is still with us and there are no signs that it is abating; hence the need to re-dedicate ourselves to that noble goal.

As is well known, Lesotho is one of the least-developed countries. It is in recognition of that fact that we are committing a considerable proportion of our meagre resources to the war against poverty. Among other measures, we have decided to tackle educational deficiency in the country, which is one of the main contributors to poverty. In this regard, Government has been increasing the annual budget for education by 4 per cent in real terms, and this increase has had a significant impact on the delivery of education and the attainment of an adult literacy rate of 70.5 per cent. Furthermore, the Government has recently announced its intention to introduce free primary education beginning in the year 2000.

What we, however, find puzzling is the scepticism of some of our development partners regarding the sustainability of the programme. If its viability were a cause for concern, we would have expected expressions of support to ensure the success of such a worthy initiative, which is in keeping with so many goals of global conferences for poverty eradication.

The rampant HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa is putting an unbearable strain on already fragile health systems, eroding the gains made in child survival and the achievement of better health. The combination of HIV/AIDS and malaria is closely associated with

increases in maternal mortality and the significant reduction in life expectancy in many African countries. We commend the work of the United Nations system in this regard, and in particular the indication that the response of the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, in partnership with various bodies, including the private sector, is commensurate with the gravity of the situation. The assistance of the international community is required to continue these efforts.

The problem of external debt, which continues to be a developmental problem for Africa, received considerable attention at the recent Cologne Summit of the G-8, and promising decisions were taken to relieve the debt of the highly indebted poor countries. Lesotho appreciates the various initiatives to ameliorate the problem and in general supports them, including the effort to find appropriate financing mechanisms for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. While Lesotho has successfully endeavoured to meet its international financial obligations and commitments, my Government is now faced with a heavy and unbearable burden of debt-servicing, which is constraining our national development efforts. We therefore call for a review of the Initiative, with a view to substantially relaxing the eligibility criteria so that debt-stressed countries like Lesotho may also benefit from it.

The recent sale of gold reserves by some countries has already resulted in a substantial drop in the price of gold and the consequential closure of marginal gold mines in South Africa. The overall impact has been reduced employment opportunities, not only in South Africa but also in neighbouring countries, such as Lesotho, which have traditionally depended on employment in South African gold mines. Let us take care not to create an African employment crisis so soon after the Asian financial crisis. It is incumbent upon the international community to work with affected countries to develop strategies for mitigating the negative effects of whatever mechanisms are agreed for financing the HIPC Initiative.

The General Assembly decided at its fifty-second session to hold an event in the year 2001 for the purpose of addressing, in a holistic manner, the question of financing for development in both its national and international aspects and in the context of globalization and interdependence. We must face up to the fact that development is in crisis and that, unless we take bold measures to find resources for financing it, the future of mankind is bleak indeed. My delegation fully shares the view that through this process, which will also address development through the perspective of finance, the international community will be afforded a unique opportunity to start the new millennium with a momentous political gesture that demonstrates global solidarity for, *inter alia*, poverty eradication and the attainment of economic growth and sustainable development.

It is in the interest of all countries to pursue development cooperation on the basis of genuine partnership and mutually beneficial arrangements. We remain convinced that the contemporary realities of globalization and liberalization make it clear that capital flows from developed countries not only benefit developing countries, but also combine in a dynamic process with the resources of developing countries in a manner that brings benefits to both developing and developed countries.

We also want to stress that every effort should be made to narrow the gap between developing countries — in particular, the least developed countries, such as Lesotho — and the developed countries. In this regard, we await with anticipation the outcome of the review next year of the Plan of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

It is worth repeating that when we adopted the Programme of Action at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in September 1994, we were committing ourselves to the support of strategies aimed at enhancing the quality of life for families and individuals through recognition of their rights to quality services. The Conference was indeed a turning point that marked a departure from the notion of population control to a human-rights-based approach in addressing our demographic concerns.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to rededicate itself to the principles of democracy, good governance, observance of human rights and the rule of law as the only way in which all of us can ensure a prosperous and lasting future for all our peoples.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Lesotho for the statement he has just made.

The Right Honourable Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of Lesotho, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Salim El-Hoss, Prime Minister of Lebanon

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Lebanon.

Mr. Salim El-Hoss, Prime Minister of Lebanon, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of Lebanon, His Excellency Mr. Salim El-Hoss, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. El-Hoss (Lebanon) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: It is my pleasure, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We are confident that your efforts and expertise will ensure the success of this session.

I should also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for having successfully conducted the work of the fifty-third session. Furthermore, I would be remiss if I failed to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedication to the pursuit of world peace and stability and for his continuous efforts to enhance the credibility of the Organization through the settlement of disputes, old and new.

This session is unique not only because it is the last General Assembly session of the century that witnessed the birth of the United Nations, but also because it coincides with the emergence of serious trends that call for by-passing some of the basic principles on which the United Nations was built. They advocate the establishment of a new world order, one to whose requirements the United Nations must conform rather than being part of the wider and more comprehensive United Nations framework.

A case in point is the call to acknowledge the principle of relative sovereignty or the obligation to interfere where necessary in the internal affairs of States, or to marginalize the role of the Security Council, which is the main tool for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Some States believe that the establishment of a new world order is a result of decisive, historic developments in vision and concept. Others, however, feel that it is no more than a mere desire on the part of some to impose ideas commensurate with the drastic change that has taken place in the balance of power on the international scene. In our opinion, this issue requires further deliberations and discussions.

Through dialogue we, the peoples and countries of the world, can arrive at a unanimous understanding of the questions at hand, and in this way secure the necessary assurance in our pursuit of the common good and security of humanity. History has shown that no regime or system can endure and prevail unless it is built on justice and equality. It cannot be selective, nor can it pursue a policy of double standards. It cannot assert its authority over some and remain indifferent to injustices done to others. It cannot give generously to some and persistently deprive others. Any system that seeks to maintain international peace and security must depend on preventive diplomacy to preempt problems long before their onset and exacerbation.

Furthermore, it should create an effective mechanism for peacemaking, one that contributes seriously to building and safeguarding peace. It is essential that we tackle the root causes of problems, not merely their violent manifestations.

We must also persevere in our pursuit of world economic and social justice. We should not be content with defending stability from a restrictively political perspective.

In any event, no world order, whether old or new, can condone, for example, the occupation of the lands of others by force. It cannot allow acts of aggression to be committed against people and property, nor should it subject civilians to various forms of arbitrary practices.

In March 1978, Israel undertook a unilateral act of aggression against Lebanon. It occupied one tenth of Lebanese territory. In the face of this aggression, the Security Council adopted resolution 425 (1978) and called upon Israel to withdraw its forces from all Lebanese territories immediately and unconditionally.

Even though more than 21 years have passed since the adoption of that resolution by the Security Council, it has not been enforced. Israel continues to occupy cherished parts of southern Lebanon and the Western Bekaa valley. Throughout those years, Israel has continued its almost daily acts of aggression against Lebanon and its people.

In 1982, Israel's hostility peaked when its forces invaded Lebanese territory, reaching the capital, Beirut, after a long siege. After a partial withdrawal from Lebanon, Israel resorted to the current scorched-earth policy. Throughout the month of July 1993, Israel bombed dozens of Lebanese villages and towns from land, air and sea positions. It inflicted heavy property damage, killed and wounded more than 250 civilians and forced more than 300,000 Lebanese out of their homes and villages.

In April 1996, continuing its policy of comprehensive destruction and bombardment, Israel intentionally massacred 102 civilians in the village of Qana, using incendiary bombs. Most of our fallen martyrs were women, children and elderly men who sadly thought they could find a safe haven in the premises of the United Nations forces in southern Lebanon, but alas, Israel did not hesitate to violate the sanctity of those premises.

Soon after, an understanding was reached for a ceasefire and for protecting civilians. This became known later as the April Understanding of 1996. A group was established to monitor the implementation of that agreement, with the membership of Lebanon, Syria and Israel and under the co-chairmanship of France and the United States of America.

Allow me, on this occasion, to express our appreciation to the group for the useful and restraining role it has played pending the realization of the full and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanese territories.

Unfortunately, this has not prevented Israel from repeatedly and seriously violating the terms of the April Understanding. Israel has lately launched yet another attack against Lebanese civilians and infrastructure. On 24 and 25 June 1999, Israeli warplanes destroyed two power plants and three bridges, causing a total blackout in Lebanon. Communications were jeopardized, extensive property damage was incurred and many people were killed. This Israeli act of aggression has had direct and indirect negative effects on the social and economic life of Lebanon until this very moment.

Israel persists in its oppressive arbitrary practices against civilians in the territories that are still under its occupation. Civilians are kidnapped, detained, tortured or killed, displaced or expelled.

We in Lebanon are tirelessly working with the United Nations and other humanitarian forums to put an end to these acts and to prevent their recurrence, the most recent of which was the imposition of siege on the village of Atta al-Sha'b and other villages in the south. Agricultural crops were destroyed and many of the residents were kidnapped, expelled or detained.

On 14 July 1999, Lebanon celebrated Lebanese prisoners' day. From this rostrum, we again call for the redoubling of efforts and for bringing more pressure to bear on Israel to release all the Lebanese detainees languishing in Israeli prisons as hostages.

Israel's Supreme Court has acknowledged and condoned holding these prisoners. Some of these people are incarcerated in al-Khiyam detention camp inside Lebanese occupied territories. There are many elderly and sick among them who are often denied visits and the humanitarian care usually provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross. This is a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention concerning the protection of civilians in time of war.

On this occasion, Lebanon emphasizes once again its right to be compensated for the loss of life and for the property damage that has been inflicted upon it for many years as a result of Israel's acts of aggression and arbitrary practices against its civilians.

Lebanon recalls the need for the unconditional implementation of resolution 425 (1978). Pending the enforcement of that resolution, it is only natural that the Lebanese people stand united in resisting Israeli occupation. It is also just and natural that they uphold the legitimacy of the Lebanese resistance, which is after all an embodiment of the faith in one's homeland and a highly evolved form of struggle for freedom. Moreover, the Lebanese resistance constitutes a consecration of the legitimate right of self-defense included in the terms of reference of the April Understanding of 1996.

Israel repeatedly circumvents the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). For our part, we highly value the positive and constructive role that UNIFIL plays. On this occasion, we would like to express once again our appreciation and gratitude to the Force for the noble sacrifices it has made in fulfilling its mandate under the most arduous circumstances.

Lebanon is certainly committed to the Middle East peace process. Lebanon stands ready, given the inseparability of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, to resume the negotiations from the point where they left off

in 1996 and in accordance with the terms of reference of the 1991 Madrid Conference. Our ultimate objective is to reach a just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy. Lebanon reiterates here its commitment to resolution 425 (1978), which does not call on the parties concerned to negotiate but does unequivocally call upon Israel to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from all Lebanese territories.

At a time when serious prospects have appeared on the horizon for the resumption of the peace negotiations, and despite what might be said about the art of negotiation, the recent declarations by senior Israeli officials do not auger well for the peace process. Nor do they expressly indicate the presence of presumably good intentions. They do not leave room for us to conclude that there is a genuine desire on the part of the Israeli side to establish peace based on justice. All of this prompts us to view with caution the conditions set out for the resumption of the peace process at the present stage, to say the least.

Israel's intransigence becomes all the more apparent in the light of the statements made by its Prime Minister Barak. In those statements, Mr. Barak stressed several no's, namely, no to a return to the 1967 borders, no to the partition of Jerusalem, no to dismantling the settlements, and no to the return of Palestinian refugees. Mr. Barak repeated his position when he declared at his recent meeting with President Clinton that the Palestinian refugees shall not return to their homeland and that they should stay in the countries where they presently reside. The natural prerequisites of peace cannot be reconciled with Mr. Barak's no's. Those prerequisites are based on justice and have been endorsed by international legitimacy. They require the following elements.

Israel should withdraw unconditionally from Lebanon, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

All of the Golan Heights should be returned to Syria, to the borders of 4 June 1967, as has already been discussed and agreed upon.

The Palestinian people should be able to regain their inalienable rights. Those rights include their right to self-determination, to the establishment of their State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, and their right to return to the lands in Palestine from which they were uprooted.

On this occasion Lebanon would like to draw the attention of the international community to the fact that it is impossible for a peaceful settlement to be achieved and for the long-awaited peace to endure and prevail unless the Palestinian refugees, particularly the hundreds of thousands whom Lebanon has hosted on its soil, are allowed to return to their homeland. From this international rostrum, Lebanon resonates its people's unanimous and unequivocal rejection of settling Palestinian refugees on its territories. This unanimity was consecrated in the Lebanese Constitution, which is the cornerstone of the national covenant. We see it as necessary to draw attention to the danger of approaching this question from a merely economic and social perspective while ignoring its political dimension. That political dimension is, in essence, the core of the injustice that befell the Palestinians who were displaced from their homeland. This unanimous position is shared by both the Lebanese and the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Lebanon therefore renews its call for the international community to shoulder its responsibility in full. It must come up with a just and equitable settlement that addresses the issue of the final status of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with the internationally agreed principles that govern similar situations. Those principles, it should be recalled, were recently applied in Kosovo. Settling Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, which is equally rejected by the Palestinians and the Lebanese, would create, if carried out, a potential hotbed of tension that would jeopardize the security of the Middle East region and its stability as well.

We view positively the opportunity for progress in the peace process. The recent visit by United States Secretary of State Madame Madeleine Albright to some countries in the region was an acknowledgment of the responsibilities of her country and the influence that that visit can bring to bear on the parties to the conflict. For our part, we are keen on the role that the United States and the Russian Federation can play in the pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace. We believe that they can both provide the necessary guarantees for the successful implementation of the prospective agreement.

We equally count on an active European role in both the political process and the development of the region as well. This applies to the negotiations for the settlement of the conflict and to the subsequent stage. We particularly applaud the supportive role of France, on which we can always rely.

We would like on this occasion to thank the Presidency of the European Union, currently held by Finland. Our thanks go in particular to Ms. Tarja Halonen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, who recently visited Lebanon as part of her visit to the region. Ms. Halonen expressed the European Union's readiness to contribute to the search for a just, peaceful and comprehensive solution to the Middle East question.

Lebanon was among the first countries to condemn the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. It supported all the Security Council resolutions adopted in this regard. We express our solidarity with sisterly Kuwait on the question of the release of Kuwaiti detainees and prisoners of war. We also support Kuwait's claim of sovereignty over all of its territories and resources. Releasing the Kuwaiti prisoners can contribute to the improvement of inter-Arab relations. At the same time, Lebanon hopes that the embargo imposed on the brotherly people of Iraq be lifted. They, too, are entitled to live in dignity and to enjoy prosperity and security.

Lebanon attaches special importance to the question of consolidating the security and stability of the Arab Gulf region. We applaud the efforts made by Gulf Cooperation Council to eliminate the causes of tension and to settle existing disputes by peaceful means in the context of good faith and good neighbourly relations. Those efforts were undertaken to settle, among other things, the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran over three islands.

The United Nations is the sum total of the collective will of its Member States. It has been unable to discharge all of its obligations in the context of the settlement of protracted and new disputes. It has also been unable to restore peace to many of the tension-ridden regions of the world. It is appropriate to proceed with the reform programme envisaged for the international Organization, as outlined by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1997. This will enable the United Nations to respond to the accelerated pace of international relations in the political, economic and social fields.

But despite all the risks and pitfalls, our international Organization is still a unique international authority. It is the proper forum in which to engage in a balanced and objective discussion that will lead to at least some necessary solutions. It is heartening indeed to recall that the Organization has had some outstanding and promising achievements in several fields of human endeavour. These include achievements in the fields of human rights, the rights of the child and women's rights, as well as environment and development. They also include the progressive development of international law and the enriching of the body of international law by the establishment of new institutions such as the International Criminal Court.

It is pertinent to mention in this respect that Lebanon has a time-honoured culture that is deeply rooted in history. Our country has been an integral part of the international scene, acting and reacting to it positively, since it joined the Organization as a founding Member. Because of its openness and intellectual wealth, it has always taken the lead in responding to the requirements of progress at various levels.

Lebanon is seeking to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). It has been working steadily to develop its economy and rationalize its financial policies. By so doing, it will be able to bring these policies in line with the standards and regulations drawn up by WTO. This will ultimately pave the way for a world economic partnership in trade and development on the basis of mutual benefit and equality among States.

Lebanon attaches great importance to environmental issues and has created a ministry for this specific purpose. Lebanon joins in the international efforts currently under way to resolve these problems. It calls upon powerful States to honour the commitments they entered into under the international conventions concluded for this purpose.

Lebanon also believes that the phenomenon of globalization has become a reality that is imbued with both positive and negative elements, which in turn influence the cultures and economies of Member States. In our opinion, the United Nations is the proper forum to address and check the repercussions of this phenomenon. It is in fact the mature offspring of the 1940s version of globalization.

Lebanon has always been firm in its commitment to the principles of democracy and freedom and faithful to its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. It has always honoured the decisions and resolutions of the international Organization and its various bodies and conferences. We have built in our capital, Beirut, a beautiful headquarters building for its subsidiary bodies. We believe in its mission and are committed to its purposes.

Lebanon is currently devoting every effort to complete the process of reconstruction and to consolidate and rationalize its institutions. We are steadily working on establishing the rule of law. Our unique experience with coexistence, built on moderation, tolerance and unity in a sound national environment, is an example to be followed. Lebanon is determined to regain the distinguished position it once held in the region and the world. It will remain true to its Arab identity, with all the consequences and dimensions that this entails.

Lebanon is a small country on the east coast of the Mediterranean. For 5,000 years, it has hosted successive civilizations. Lebanon influenced these civilizations and was influenced by them. We shall take the lead in giving, once we have recovered our national soil thanks to the struggle of our sons and with the effective support of the international community.

The President. On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Lebanon for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Salim El-Hoss, Prime Minister of Lebanon, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Luxembourg, Mrs. Lydie Polfer.

Mrs. Polfer (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset, Sir, warmly to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly, which marks the opening of the regular annual session. Your wise and dynamic leadership will determine the scope and outcome of our work.

I would like also to thank Mr. Didier Opertti for his dedication and commitment throughout the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

Let me also reiterate Luxembourg's confidence, given our Secretary-General's characteristic tireless determination to promote dialogue, knowledge and mutual recognition, that his efforts will lead to greater mutual understanding.

The respect accorded to, and the effectiveness of, our Organization will depend on the strong cohesiveness of its membership. Within its modest means, my country intends to contribute to this key objective. Luxembourg is proud of having participated in the definition of the European Union's core positions. These were explained to the Assembly by Mrs. Tarja Halonen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, in the statement she made in her capacity as current Chairman-in-Office of the European Union.

This fall will mark the tenth anniversary of the end of the cold war, which for more than four decades hampered the harmonious development of international relations. Among other things, it prevented our Organization from fully discharging its mandate to maintain international peace and cooperation. This anniversary is definitely a happy one, even if much of what had been hoped for in 1989 has failed to materialize and the consequences of certain upheavals are still being felt.

Nonetheless, today's international environment has seen far-reaching changes, and the international community is now in a position to tackle very complex challenges. My country hopes that this historic breakthrough at century's end will be further consolidated.

Today is my first opportunity to represent my country from this rostrum and to address the Assembly, which comprises nearly all the countries of the world. Luxembourg is one of the founding Members of our Organization, and in October 1945, it was the smallest. Our presence in San Francisco was due to our determination to cooperate with the international community and to reaffirm our sovereignty. Today I would reiterate the commitment of the people of Luxembourg to our Organization, which is called upon to play a pivotal role in an international environment that is becoming increasingly globalized yet, at the same time, more and more fragmented.

While the first aspect of this process, globalization, is most apparent in the economic field, the second, fragmentation, is more clearly felt in the political arena, as social inequities are increasing. This process will undoubtedly result in very complex tensions, heightening those that already exist and creating new ones. These will have to be analyzed and dealt with; to do this we will need imagination, clear-sightedness and, above all, an effective resolve and capacity to act. Our security and prosperity will depend on the way in which our Organization confronts these challenges.

It would be unrealistic to expect a solution from the Organization every time humanitarian disaster strikes or a conflict breaks out. There is no such thing as a world

government, and it would be a disservice to the United Nations to fail to acknowledge this obvious fact.

Nevertheless, the United Nations is a platform and a forum for negotiations at the global level, and we should therefore exert every effort to ensure its smooth functioning. To do this it must have adequate funding to duty bound to respect their Charter obligation to pay in full, unconditionally and on time the amounts they owe to the Organization. This also means that increasingly, the major political orientations of the Organization are decided upon by consensus, thereby ensuring the support of all States for its actions. It also means that the effort to update and reform the United Nations mechanisms still remains fully relevant.

It is only through cooperation, understanding and solidarity, together with respect for commitments entered into and for the rule of law, that progress towards a true cohesiveness will be possible. All the Members of our Organization are directly responsible for ensuring that their contribution to the common undertaking and to its progress is not lacking. This was the case during the decision to create an International Criminal Court. We have thus reached an important stage in the field of international ethics and morality by providing ourselves with an instrument through which those responsible for atrocities in time of war and for crimes against humanity will be held to account. The international community will henceforth be more vigilant and will no longer allow those who have been found guilty of such crimes to continue to enjoy impunity. My country will ratify the Statute of the Court as soon as possible, and we hope that it will soon become a reality.

My country's profound commitment to the European Union, which is preparing to enlarge its membership, is a sure reflection of our strong aspiration to strengthen both the internal cohesion of the countries of the region and to promote cooperation at an international level. The contribution of the European Union to the life of our Organization is intended to be a driving force for its further development.

Small countries like mine tend to develop an acute awareness of their own vulnerability. This is often further aggravated by a considerable difficulty: that of making known to our foreign partners a little-known national reality. That explains our commitment to the vitality and smooth functioning of intergovernmental organizations. For us, the United Nations represents an irreplaceable forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences, but to an even greater extent it must be a tool for the maintenance of international peace and security, development and respect for universal values.

A new Government has just taken office in Luxembourg. Its first task will be to ensure the continuity of our foreign commitments. But it also intends consistently to develop our policy of demonstrating our presence, participation and solidarity at the international level. This determination will be expressed through the major intergovernmental organizations, which define the rules of coexistence between nations and peoples. The United Nations unquestionably takes pride of place among them.

My Government also intends to further develop its relations with the more remote regions of the world. This is an effort to respond to a real deficiency, which can be explained by our size and our limited human resources. It is important for us to remedy that situation through a balanced programme of contacts. The United Nations, and the presence of numerous delegations at United Nations Headquarters in New York and at Geneva, will doubtless provide us opportunities conducive to achieving that end.

The United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report this year undertakes an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of globalization. It clearly brings out the beneficial aspects and the opportunities provided by this process, while at the same time showing the negative consequences, which are very serious and worrying: instability in financial relations, high unemployment, an unsteady job market, the ravages of AIDS, the increasing inequalities between North and South, the extension of those inequalities to the field of knowledge and the constantly growing marginalization of a large number of developing countries.

The political and social effects of these developments are no less worrying: increased impoverishment, new forms of crime and violence, increased migration, the destabilization of States and the growing number of conflicts. Faced with these issues, the States Members of this Organization have a major responsibility to assume. The proposals contained in the report therefore deserve constructive examination, and my delegation is ready to take part in it. Ensuring that there is a social and ethical dimension to globalization, agreeing on new rules for good world governance and protecting the environment are some of the major issues to be agreed on in forthcoming discussions. That is why

we intend to deepen our commitment in areas related to human development.

The fight against poverty, which the United Nations has declared to be a priority objective, cannot be conducted only in the economic sphere. It should be part of an overall plan that also deals with related factors such as the lack of family care facilities, shortcomings in education and health and insufficient administrative structures. A reallocation of resources is also required as part of this effort. In that spirit, Luxembourg is now in the process of meeting the targets of our Organization. Starting in the year 2000, it will be devoting 0.7 per cent of its gross national product to official development assistance. The Government of Luxembourg has decided to increase that contribution to 1 per cent of its gross national product over the next five years. Education and health will be priority areas for our cooperation.

During the negotiations in the Millennium Round in the World Trade Organization we must take account of that context and pay particular attention to the interests of the developing countries. We also support all the efforts designed to alleviate the debt problem, particularly in the case of the least developed countries.

The vast majority of the people of Luxembourg uphold a model of society that strikes a fair balance between free enterprise and social justice. This model of a social market economy ensures development and social cohesion, even if it may require periodic adjustment. This should prove an inspiration at the regional and international levels.

Through the experience that we have gained over one and a half centuries of independence, Luxembourg is convinced that the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, the functioning of the rule of law and the transparent and ordered management of public affairs are the essential elements that help to promote development. The major conferences that have taken place during the past decade on the subjects of human rights, social development, population, the advancement of women and human settlements have opened a new era of constructive dialogue and shared responsibility, which has made a major contribution to defining and redefining the action of the United Nations in the field of development. We must ensure that henceforth there will be coordinated, integrated and effective follow-up to the steps that have been taken.

Those who represent civil society, the non-governmental organizations, are essential partners of our Governments in the implementation of the programmes and action plans developed and adopted during the major conferences. It is those people who work in the field in direct contact with women, men and children who are at the very centre or our efforts. We therefore attach great importance to their close association with the follow-up process for the conferences and the preparations for future activities.

Other meetings are in preparation, notably those on the subjects of racism and development financing. Each of these initiatives is part of our effort to promote a fairer and more equitable society, both internationally and within our own national societies. The United Nations serves as a catalyst in this process. It is undeniable that in this field our Organization has found an innovative and useful role to play.

It is indeed paradoxical that a decade that was originally marked by a desire for openness has ended with a disturbing new outbreak of bloody conflicts and practices that we thought had become things of the past. How can we overlook the growing number of humanitarian tragedies and fail to see the increasing expressions of nationalism, intolerance and refusal to accept those who are different? They highlight the historical or newly erected barriers which have made impractical any dialogue between majorities and minorities.

In these circumstances, there is a new requirement. As the Secretary-General has said, strict adherence to the traditional concept of State sovereignty is no longer sufficient to meet present-day realities. We must investigate new ways to live together in society that will respect the character of each individual. We must find ways to improve the functioning of democracy so that it will be better able to accommodate internal diversity.

This Organization, especially the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, has not been given sufficient means to adapt to new situations. The structures of the Security Council are inadequate after several decades during which it has been impossible to carry out a thorough review. Although discussions on Council reform have been under way for more than five years, there is a prevailing feeling of powerlessness. It seems unlikely that any new movement can result from the repeated clash of known positions.

Since last autumn, Security Council action has been hamstrung by the reemergence of schisms harking back

to a bygone age. Now as then, the result is an inability to act, so the matter of Iraq has been bogged down. For more than a year, Council members have been unable to work together and formulate a viable monitoring system that would guarantee that the Iraqi regime no longer possesses weapons of mass destruction. This dispute benefits only those who continue to flout international law. The credibility of the United Nations can hardly gain from this prevarication.

The recent political and humanitarian crisis in Kosovo has shown that the community of nations no longer has either sufficient determination or sufficient means to prevent tragedies of that scale. In the face of the horror of ethnic cleansing, a number of countries were obliged to shoulder their responsibilities. The tragic deterioration of the situation on the ground and the lack of realism at the negotiating table made military action inevitable. My country demonstrated its active solidarity during that tragedy, because a passive response to such crimes is no more acceptable in the international arena than it is at home. Today, pacification is under way in Kosovo, but minorities must be protected, respect for the law must be guaranteed, and democratic institutions must be set up. The Organization, in collaboration with other institutions, has taken these tasks in hand.

The international community's commitment to build multi-ethnic, multicultural, democratic societies in the Balkans holds out to the Serbian leadership and the Serbian population the prospect of a peaceful, secure and prosperous future in the community of Europe. It is up to them to seize this opportunity.

The Secretary-General has said that United Nations action cannot stop until stability, security and peace return to the entire African continent. That goal is far from having been achieved, with serious conflicts taking place in central Africa and in Angola. But there are glimmers of light in Sierra Leone, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Horn of Africa. The crises there, while not yet resolved, are at least on the path of negotiation. It is encouraging to note that this progress has been achieved thanks to the active participation of the countries of the region.

We cannot allow the fate of Africa to slip out of the field of action of the international community. We must control the diverse situations relating to politics, development and the democratization of society to enable the continent to recover its proper place in the comity of nations. That can be achieved only through sustained, concerted medium-term and long-term action by the international community and by the United Nations system. My country will participate fully in these efforts.

In East Timor it seemed that, after 25 years of injustice and oppression, there was a process that would give the Timorese people an opportunity peacefully to take charge of their future. Their desire for independence was freely and clearly expressed under United Nations auspices. Despite the Indonesian authorities having committed themselves to guaranteeing order and security before and after the popular consultation, grave violations occurred in East Timor, followed by massacres and the large-scale deportation of civilians. We welcome the dispatch of a multinational force under United Nations authority to put a rapid end to the violence and the atrocities, and to repatriate people in decent conditions. We support the efforts of the Secretary-General and of the United Nations Mission in East Timor to continue the process leading to the independence of East Timor. We must quickly improve the island's humanitarian situation, which continues to deteriorate, inflicting suffering on the population concerned.

In the Middle East, after years of deadlock, Israelis and Palestinians have resumed negotiations with the participation of other parties to the peace process, with the declared intention of concluding them by the autumn of 2000, which would coincide with the Millennium Assembly. Could anyone imagine a finer symbol of concerted international action to restore peace and security than lasting reconciliation in a land that is the cradle of so many religions and so many civilizations?

The Millennium Summit will give us the chance to take stock of what has been accomplished and of what the complex decade of the 1990s has brought us, as well as to chart the course for future action. The Secretary-General has outlined this in his report on the work of the Organization. We must give him effective tools to forestall catastrophes, whether caused by the elements or by the hand of man, and to coordinate our work to minimize the consequences of tragedies we are unable to avert.

In declaring its determination to tackle humanitarian challenges in a spirit of prevention rather than of reaction, the Organization has set itself an ambitious goal. It is up to us to prove our will and our capacity to work effectively to reach that goal.

The President: I call next on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, His Excellency Mr. Suleiman Majed al-Shaheen.

Mr. Al-Shaheen (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, Sir, to extend to you on behalf of the State of Kuwait our warm congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Given your extensive experience in international affairs and your personal skills and ability, we are confident that you will be able to guide the deliberations of the Assembly effectively. Let me assure Your Excellency that our delegation will cooperate with you in a diligent and constructive spirit in order to reach our common goals.

I wish also to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, who demonstrated good stewardship in his efforts to enhance the role of the Assembly.

Let me take this opportunity to express once again our deep gratitude to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless endeavours to reform the structure and streamline the functioning of the Organization with a view to bringing it more in line with the ever-changing realities of modern times.

Kuwait welcomes the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to membership in the United Nations. Our wish is that these new Member States will enhance the role and effectiveness of our Organization in the fulfilment of the objectives and purposes of the Charter.

The wheel of time is now bringing us closer to the end of the twentieth century and entry into the third millennium. Against the backdrop of this truly historic benchmark, we think that the world community should renew its resolve to achieve higher standards of living and political stability and security, all of which are essential factors for progress. With a deeper and greater sense of resolve, humankind's future can be better than our present.

Tragically, the twentieth century has seen two bitter world wars, in addition to numerous bilateral, regional and civil conflicts that claimed the lives of millions and millions of innocent human beings. Those innumerable wars put too many spikes in the wheels of growth and progress of many developing nations.

Our cherished hopes and aspirations were always directed towards fulfilling the long-standing human dream of using the immense scientific and technological discoveries and know-how acquired especially in the past few decades of the twentieth century to address or solve the major and pressing global problems and phenomena facing the human race. However, about one fifth of the human race suffers from hunger; hundreds of millions of people live below the poverty line; the arms race, for reasons of security or territorial expansion, consumes enormous proportions of national budgets or assets to the detriment of economic and development programmes; massacres driven by ethnic or political motives have become excuses for liquidating opposition forces and consolidating political dictatorships; human rights violations persist under different justifications; and the phenomenon of terrorism, which is becoming increasingly intertwined with drug abuse and illicit trafficking in drugs, imperils the stability of societies and States, with the potential risks of jeopardizing security and stability far beyond national borders. In our view, the international community must cope with these devastating dangers in a more serious fashion in order to rid the world of their evil.

Also, the millennium has seen many devastating natural disasters that resulted in vast human losses and extensive property damage. The most recent tragic example is the earthquake that struck the friendly Turkish Republic in August. We are confident that Turkey will eventually overcome the dire consequences of that national catastrophe. Along with many other countries and international relief and aid organizations, Kuwait hastily responded by airlifting basic human relief assistance and supplies. Our response emanated from humanitarian motives and our sense of good neighbourliness. In this regard, I wish to recall the decision by the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to donate $400 million to alleviate the impact of that severe quake.

In the same vein, we wish to extend our warm condolences and sympathy to the friendly Government and people of Greece and to the families of victims of the tremor that hit there earlier this month. In order to draw some lessons from the recurrence of such disasters, Kuwait calls for expanding and reinforcing the role and effectiveness of the United Nations disaster relief organs. Such a role would help coordinate the contributions of the various States in order to fulfil their desired and optimal goals, to the best of their capabilities.

My delegation now strongly feels that the international community should not underestimate the role

and achievements of the United Nations system. Its outstanding track record over the past five decades should, in our view, deepen our appreciation for the valuable and credible manner in which the United Nations system addressed and resolved many conflicts and problems across the globe. Indeed, the Untied Nations saved mankind many potential tragedies. Hence, one cannot really imagine our contemporary world without this Organization, to which Kuwait is honoured to belong.

Against the backdrop of the legacy inherited by the present generation and the possible challenges that will face us in the future, preparations are under way to convene the Millennium Assembly session here in New York in September next year. Given its historical context and the level of global participation, we hope that the session will prove to be a true benchmark in the history of humanity. Kuwait feels that such an historic occasion requires proper and adequate preparation to ensure a truly meaningful outcome in terms of sketching the future path of the Organization in the new century.

The issues on the global agenda are all serious and pressing, and some new vision is needed to deal with them. In any case, we are convinced that international cooperation and coordination and consolidation of human efforts will remain crucial to any viable endeavours to address those obstinate and interlinked problems within the framework of the United Nations. Therefore, continued support to ensure reinvigoration of the United Nations remains in order.

As we look forward to the millennial summit as an unprecedented event, we think that the forthcoming historic occasion should not be a replay of the United Nations fiftieth anniversary celebrations, which were a largely ceremonial and symbolic event. The gathering of world leaders should go beyond the usual ritual of delivering speeches and photo sessions. Rather, our objective should be charting out a meaningful path for the future in a pragmatic, action-oriented fashion. The new vision should focus on business-like treatment of universal issues such as justice for all, equality, harmonious co-existence, cooperation, inter-cultural dialogues and promotion of respect for human rights, and advancing economic and social development to the top of our global agenda.

At this juncture, allow me to highlight the fact that the State of Kuwait has been ranked number one in the Arab world and number thirty-five in the world in the United Nations Development Programme(UNDP) Human Development Report of 1999. Kuwait will, God willing, continue its steady efforts towards the improvement of the economic and social conditions across the country, guided by, among other factors, the Human Development indices. In the same vein, I wish to recall the recent initiative by His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, who proclaimed a decree granting the women of Kuwait full political rights to participate in parliamentary elections and to run as candidates for the national assembly. This initiative is yet another example of the keen interest on the part of His Highness the Amir to consolidate the democratic system in Kuwaiti society and to expand public participation in civil life. Indeed, it is a testimony to and recognition of the prominent role and the valuable contributions by Kuwaiti women to our society.

Another important goal we hope the Millennium Assembly will achieve is the expansion of the membership of the Security Council and the display of more transparency in the Council's procedures and methods of work. The question of reform of the Security Council has been exhaustively discussed over the past six years. Time has indeed come for proper action with a view to allowing all United Nations Member States to participate in the decision-making process in a more representative and equitable manner, under controls that would ensure a balance between effectiveness and larger membership. The reform should also ensure the special responsibility and ability of the Council members to maintain international peace and security.

Following the end of the cold war, the world has witnessed many challenges that threatened international peace and security in various regions. As a result of the general ease in international relations and the growing rapprochement between East and West and the mounting desire for global cooperation and coordination, the Untied Nations system, through the Security Council, the primary organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, sought to address and manage those crises according to the ways and means that were set forth in the Charter. Yes, the United Nations has achieved substantial progress, though in varying degrees, and sometimes at a very heavy price in terms of losing dedicated personnel and peacekeepers on behalf of the cause of peace and in the service of humanity. Even when the United Nations might appear to be faltering in performing its mission, sometimes perhaps in a rather embarrassing way, the theoretical question that always arises in our minds is: would that situation have been better had the United Nations not intervened? And the resultant answer that we arrive at is invariably: absolutely

not. Lapses, setbacks and failures are all, unfortunately, an inevitable tax that has to be paid in our pursuit of excellence and progress, good intentions notwithstanding.

The sanctions system, under Article 41, Chapter VII, of the Charter, is one of the tools and methods that the Security Council found itself impelled to resort to in dealing with a number of States. The objective was to make them change their behaviour and dissuade them from the pursuit of policies of aggression, which run counter to the fundamental norms and principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Experience on the ground has proved this method to be effective. On two occasions the Council suspended the sanctions imposed against some States once they had complied fully with their obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions. This proves in no uncertain terms that the sanctions were not an end in themselves, but a means used to impose respect for the Charter and the Security Council resolutions.

Acting within the terms of its responsibilities, the Security Council established at the end of last January three separate panels to evaluate the extent of Iraq's compliance with its obligations under Security Council resolutions relating to Iraq's invasion of the State of Kuwait. The Secretary-General himself participated in the selection of the members of those panels, eminent, internationally known persons who were efficient and neutral experts. The panels met for a period of two months. They also sought the expert advice of many specialists and heard the views and presentations of many witnesses. Following extensive meetings and intense deliberations, the panellists reached a set of conclusions and recommendations that I shall briefly summarize as follows.

First, the panel concerned with disarmament concluded that there were still a number of important and serious matters that had not yet been resolved. It emphasized the need for the return of the inspection teams to Iraq as soon as possible under an integrated and reinforced monitoring and verification system based on relevant Security Council resolutions.

Secondly, with regard to the humanitarian situation the panel submitted several constructive proposals and recommendations which, if implemented, would improve the humanitarian conditions in Iraq. Perhaps the most important recommendation was the call to improve the operational mechanisms of the oil-for-food programme. Also, the panel invited the Government of Iraq to ensure equitable distribution of humanitarian goods and to pay due attention to meeting the needs of the vulnerable groups of the Iraqi population.

Thirdly, the panel concerned with Kuwaiti and third-country prisoners of war and the return of stolen property to Kuwait, the panel thought that in regard to the prisoners of war issue, cooperation by Iraq with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Tripartite Commission had so far been below expectations. The panel was not satisfied with the Iraqi explanations of why Iraq had failed to provide information on the files submitted to it by the ICRC. The panel urged the Government of Iraq to reconsider its decision not to participate in the Tripartite Commission and its technical subcommittee. With regard to the return of Kuwaiti property, the panel concluded that Iraq had not fully complied with paragraph 2 of Security Council resolution 686 (1991), which demands that Iraq return all stolen property to Kuwait.

Although those panels were established by the Security Council mainly to explore the possibility of mitigating the impact of the sanctions regime and improving the humanitarian conditions in Iraq, it is deeply regrettable that Iraq itself has declined to participate in their work. Iraq has also rejected the conclusions and recommendations reached by these panels. In this context, the Secretary-General, in paragraph 81 of his report (A/54/1) on the work of the Organization submitted to the current session of the Assembly, referred to Iraq's failure to fulfil its obligations and set the humanitarian requirements that Iraq must meet. The Secretary-General states:

> "Relations with Iraq took a turn for the worse during the year, despite a brief period of compliance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and myself in February 1998. In the face of continuing Iraqi non-compliance, the use of force by two Member States and the division in the Security Council that followed it was predictable. Our principal demands remain unchanged, however: Iraq must fully comply with all relevant Security Council resolutions; the international community must be assured that Iraq no longer has the capacity to develop or use weapons of mass destruction; missing Kuwaiti and third country nationals must be accounted for; and Kuwait's irreplaceable archives must be returned. Meanwhile, the people of Iraq continue to suffer the effects of sanctions".

For purely humanitarian reasons enjoined by our Islamic religion and by all other religious as well as international principles and norms, the State of Kuwait urges Iraq to put an immediate end to the plight of Kuwaiti and third-country prisoners, returning them to their families or fully accounting for them. Iraqi insistence that there are no such prisoners inside Iraq and that these people should be considered as missing persons is not an answer. What is at stake are the lives of people, who should be treated as trusts in our collective conscience. Since last January, Iraq has been boycotting the meetings of the Tripartite Commission and its technical subcommittee, bodies that operate under the aegis of the ICRC with the objective of locating and identifying those innocent victims.

The following questions arise here. Is Iraq indeed serious in dealing with this important humanitarian matter? Does Iraq's attitude show any good faith? Would anyone safely claim that Iraq is working on implementing relevant Security Council resolutions while boycotting the meetings of ICRC-sponsored humanitarian bodies?

Only internationally established institutions can handle this issue. We believe that earnest and sincere cooperation with the Tripartite Commission is the key to the resolution of this humanitarian problem, which really does not tolerate any further delay.

An intensive effort is currently under way within the Security Council to pass a new resolution related to the remaining obligations on Iraq, taking into consideration the recommendations made by the three aforementioned evaluation panels. While Kuwait concurs with the good intentions underlying the current efforts by members of the Security Council, which take the form of a draft resolution put forward by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, together with some other related views, we would like to reaffirm the important need to maintain the unity of the Security Council in dealing with this issue. Also, we demand assurances that Iraq will remain committed to all the requirements of Security Council resolution 687 (1991), which should be treated as one indivisible political and legal unit.

In the meantime, Kuwait reiterates its full sympathy with the suffering of our brotherly people of Iraq. The Government of Iraq alone bears full responsibility for the perpetuation of those hardships. Kuwait, for its part, confirms its support for and endorsement of all Security Council resolutions aimed at easing those travails through the oil-for-food programme. Furthermore, we wish to reiterate our firm commitment to the need for the preservation of the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq.

Out of concern for and interest in bolstering the underpinnings of security and stability in our region, the State of Kuwait confirms its support for all efforts aimed at resolving the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran over the Emirates' three islands by peaceful means. These would include the referral of the matter to the International Court of Justice. In the meantime, Kuwait welcomes the willingness of the friendly Islamic Republic of Iran to start direct negotiations with the United Arab Emirates. We hope the tripartite ministerial commission formed by the Cooperation Council of the Gulf Arab States will be able to initiate working mechanisms for beginning direct negotiations that could lead to the peaceful resolution of the dispute over the three Emirates' islands: the Lesser and Greater Tunbs and Abu Musa. This avenue would indeed contribute to confidence building and to the promotion of security and stability throughout the region. It would also expand and deepen cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and all States in the region.

Kuwait welcomes the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum recently signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, which sets forth specific steps for the implementation of the Wye River accords. However, we demand that the new Administration in Israel do its part on reviving the peace process and resuming negotiations on all tracks. Israel must demonstrate honest commitment to the principles and operational framework of the overall peace process, which is anchored in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the land-for-peace formula. This includes fulfilment of all obligations and agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority within the peace process, with a view to reinstating all legitimate Arab rights, including the restoration to the brotherly Palestinian people of their full national rights, especially the establishment of their independent State on their national territory, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Government of Israel must also cease forthwith its illegitimate settlement-building and land-confiscation policy. It should also end its unilateral measures to create de facto realities on the ground, especially in the city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Palestinian refugees must be reassured of their right to return to their homes in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

We are baffled by, and accordingly reject, the references, declarations and insinuations recently made

that promote the notion of resettling the Palestinian refugees outside their own ancestral homeland. Such a notion represents a stark violation of the fundamental principles of international law, United Nations resolutions and the inalienable right to self-determination. Furthermore, a resettlement plan would be an infringement on the sovereignty of other States and an interference in their domestic affairs.

Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian territory in the Golan Heights back to the 4 June 1967 lines is indeed the litmus test of Israel's genuine commitment to the land-for-peace principle. Moreover, we demand that Israel end once and for all its repeated acts of aggression against the sovereignty and independence of our sister State, the Lebanese Republic. We stress the need for an immediate Israeli pull-out from southern Lebanon and West Bekaa in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which must be implemented without any restrictions or conditions. In this context, Kuwait emphatically notes that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks must be recognized as organically interconnected if a just and lasting peace is to be established.

In addition, while Kuwait endorses and appreciates the efforts of the two sponsors of the peace process, together with the European Union, to revitalize that process, we call upon all of them to redouble their efforts at this critical stage of the peace process.

At the regional level, and given the long-standing historical and human bonds, as well as the close economic interests fashioned by the geographic location of the Arabian Gulf region and its proximity to India and Pakistan, with which the State of Kuwait maintains friendly relations, we appeal to both countries to resolve their bilateral dispute over Jammu and Kashmir by peaceful means and in accordance with United Nations resolutions. We sincerely hope that India and Pakistan will engage in a meaningful dialogue and draw on the deep and rich reservoir of wisdom available to the leaderships on both sides of the divide. We think that their economic resources would better be utilized for the development and welfare of their peoples and for enhancing security and stability in that sensitive region. Mutual confidence and cooperation should prevail over intense rivalry in the arena of terror.

Kuwait welcomes the outcome of the popular consultation held under United Nations supervision in East Timor late last month. The ballot gave the East Timorese the chance to determine their future freely, with the guarantee and cooperation of the friendly Government of Indonesia. Kuwait has followed with sadness and pain the bloody events that have taken place in East Timor. However, we welcome the Security Council resolution to establish a multinational force to put an end to violence and to restore security and public order to that Territory. We wish that force full success in its mission. We also call upon neighbouring countries to respect the mandate of the force and to help the people of East Timor fulfil their legitimate aspirations. In this regard, Kuwait wishes to give credit to the friendly Government of Indonesia for its commitment and efforts at putting an end to the violence, the killing and destruction that ravaged East Timor in the wake of the referendum. Credit is also due Indonesia for agreeing to the formation and peaceful reception of the multinational force.

Still on the international scene, Kuwait welcomes the peace accord reached between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on Kosovo as a first step towards the resolution of the dispute and the return of displaced persons to their homes in Kosovo. This will eventually put an end to the conflict and restore peace and security to the people, who have the right to live in freedom and dignity.

The Balkan crisis, which was precipitated by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has demonstrated once again that the United Nations role is indispensable to the maintenance of international peace and security and for lending legitimacy and credibility to any solutions reached, be it in a regional context or an international one. Kuwait supports and encourages the United Nations to continue its role until all aspects of the crisis have definitively resolved.

The world today is living through a communications revolution that has helped to shorten distances between States and to speed up global connections, thus turning our planet into a village where people instantly react to events that take place anywhere across the globe. International economic integration has become part and parcel of development plans and programmes that aim at achieving progress and prosperity for nations. Unilateral isolationist policies have become relics of the past and untenable under a new world order that is becoming increasingly and rapidly universal.

The new order, known as "globalization", requires joint efforts in order to lay down the principles, regulations and arrangements that seek to ensure progress and well-being by creating new prospects for the flow of

financial and technical aid to help national States project their ability to contribute to the building of a better future for humanity. Hence, developed countries are expected to increase their economic and technical assistance to developing States and to expand the exchange of information and technical know-how in an attempt to narrow the ever-widening gap in the fields of technology and communications.

Moreover, international efforts must be invigorated in the face of a new emerging challenge posed by the dwindling sources of fresh water. Water reserves should be utilized on a just basis and with a sense of sharing in the use of this main artery of life itself. Bearing that vision in mind, Kuwait is pursuing its efforts to support development projects in many developing countries. The Kuwait Fund for Economic Development offers long-term financial loans at concessional interest rates. Also, my country contributes, within its means, to many development projects and programmes that are jointly financed by international financial institutions, regional organizations and the United Nations agencies. Kuwait intends to pursue this path out of its conviction that development is the key to progress and a main incentive for building security and stability. Furthermore, reaching out with assistance to those in need is a moral obligation on those who are more privileged. This would indeed strengthen international cooperation, openness and mutual respect among nations.

Now, as our world is about to bid farewell to the current century, good-hearted and decent people nurture various hopes and ambitions for serving humanity and building a better life on this small planet. We all hope to create and conserve a safe and healthy environment, free of threats to the security of all life. As we look down the road to the future, we can hopefully see a fulfilment of the divine prophecy of justice for humanity when we heed God's words, calling on us to feed the hungry and to ensure peace of mind and security for all human beings. We wish world leaders who will be assembled in this Hall in September next year success in defining a road map for the future, in setting a new vision and in renewing our common resolve to establish peace, justice and development for all peoples of the world.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay and President of the preceding session of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti.

Mr. Opertti (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first, on behalf of my Government and myself, to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, on his well-deserved election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We wish him every success and assure him of my delegation's sincere cooperation in carrying out his work.

I also wish to express a warm welcome to the new Members: the Republics of Kiribati and Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

A little more than a week ago, we had the opportunity to address this same body at the close the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. On that occasion, we expressed a general view of the Organization as a whole, as well as of some of the items or questions of greater relevance. That view cannot differ basically from the one I am now expressing as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

In order to contribute to the debate of ideas, we did not silence then, nor will we now, certain views on the international community, on the changes it is experiencing and on the response capability of the United Nations to face the new situations or expectations of the Member States, especially the demands of regions or areas of the world experiencing diverse types of suffering.

This suffering is at times basically economic in origin — call it underdevelopment or more simply, poverty and even extreme destitution — with all the attending consequences of marginalization and exclusion. In other cases, suffering stems from problems of civilization that tend to show alarming signs of deterioration. We must also emphasize that the turmoil and instability experienced by peoples are not in every case due to one and the same cause, whether of a material or economic nature or because of the lack of resources.

We observe phenomena such as violence, dramatically present at the individual or collective level; terrorism of all kinds, blind and relentless; and, of course, the drug problem in its diverse stages, including the entrepreneurial business of its traffic and its perverse destabilizing effect, and drug consumption, which is destructive to the individual and is also related to family dissolution. There is also the absence of or weakness in educational standards that adequately prioritize the ethical dimension and human values as a great pedagogical goal.

Perhaps none of us yet possesses the key to explain the real origin of these pathological phenomena, but what is very clear is that we cannot affect ignorance about them, as if they were foreign to us — Governments, States, peoples and organizations.

Without prejudice to what was just said, we recognize first the central role the Organization must play in terms of international peacekeeping and security. On the other hand, it is necessary to give special attention to the dreadful consequences of nationalist excesses, to confront the exclusive and unfair fundamentalism of religions, to fight discrimination, whatever the basic claims or pretexts are, and to make tolerance a basic principle of relations among individuals and peoples. All are unavoidable duties of the United Nations.

We must now establish and reaffirm our position as a Member State on those main items — some of which are planned, others under way and others still to come — regarding what is to be done.

I refer first to the reform of the Organization and of the Charter, and in particular to the reform of the Security Council. These are priorities that must continue at a pace imposed by the complexity of the matter, by the current state of international relations and, above all, by the expectation of world public opinion that moves momentarily from hope to anxiety. If it is true, as it is said, that time takes revenge on things done without prior consultation, it is just as true that medicine refined for a long time, as the Italian master Carnelutti reminds us, could arrive too late, when the patient is already dead.

Reform requires a balance, a balance between sudden need and efficiency, between rigidity and flexibility and between unavoidable principles and the just appreciation of new realities. In favour of this balance, the General Assembly approved in November 1998 resolution 53/30, requiring at least a two-thirds majority for the approval of any reform relating to the membership of the Security Council. This dispelled concern about a reform being approved by non-representative majorities, opening up a new phase. This is contained in the report of the Open-ended Working Group on reform of the Security Council, established by consensus by the General Assembly by resolution 48/26, in the chapter entitled "Observations".

It will be your task, Mr. President, to give renewed momentum to this process on the basis of its progress and of other steps which, however modest and far from resolving the matter, advance in denoting certain basic points concerning which there is at least a common diagnosis. Although distant from final solutions, these points are always adjustable to the changes of the international community.

The Government of Uruguay, my country — an active Member State of this Organization and of other world and regional organizations, both political and integration ones — has observed and continues to see well-constituted international institutions as the main guarantee for the observance a more just, foreseeable and fair international order. Therefore, when distinguishing the vital from the superficial and rhetorical speech from the true search for agreements, which can involve reciprocal concessions, the delegation of Uruguay will be in favour of change and against stagnation — but not just any change. It will favour change that restores to the United Nations a level of international recognition which, without sacrificing efficacy, would make the Member States and their regions feel that they are a tangible and active reality, that those subregions cannot be under-represented.

There is no longer a place for an elitist international society that freezes obsolete historical periods in time, typical of a dialectic of confrontation measured in terms of the cold war. We must propose new formulas to avoid the effect of blockage that in many cases produces the conspicuous right to veto, granting the Security Council the procedural means to break it and even entrusting the General Assembly, under certain conditions, as proposed by my delegation, with new competencies so that it could be formally informed and its decision be required in situations which demand it, particularly when it concerns cases that could involve the legitimate use of force.

The recent problem in Kosovo, which continues, could serve as a typical example of the aforementioned paralysing effect of the veto in the Security Council, without forgetting the disturbing consequences that effect would have in producing the marginalization of the United Nations system of peace and security, with the resulting questioning of the Organization itself and its real possibilities.

This, naturally, requires the foresight of international law as the sole source of legitimacy, without ignoring the authentic and grave humanitarian situations that are imposed on us by the drama of the real facts at a time when they require a formal framework of timely, legitimate and efficient international action.

We also attach special meaning to the improvement of the rules of procedure and the working methods of the Security Council, and we therefore trust that the proposals elaborated by the Open-ended Working Group will be adopted.

An optimistic initiative of the Organization, encouraged by the Secretariat and the Member States, is undoubtedly the so-called millennium summit, which will take place at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. Regarding its agenda, there will be a certain tendency in favour of approving a main topic of common interest, capable of stirring the attention and participation of heads of State and Government.

As this is the most important point now under debate here, and since I wished to contribute when I was President of the General Assembly, I now say quite simply that in our view the main theme should be "The United Nations: its future viability". This would generate, like the organs of a single body, related fundamental issues, perhaps formulated as important questions, such as: Towards a new system of international security? Does globalization demand new strategies of the world Organization? What more concrete strategies can there be for the elimination of poverty and underdevelopment? How can we review the system for the protection of human rights, with a view to strengthening and improving them, particularly in the fields of the family, children, education and international cooperation?

Naturally, we are aware that for the millennium summit to be successful and give hope for the next century, its agenda must reflect the expectations of Member States, which still show marked differences. My Government will continue to participate in the preparation of the summit with interest and in a responsible manner.

The initiative for dialogue between civilizations — 2001 is to be the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations — proposed by Iran and approved by consensus by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session — is the kind of topic that is at the heart of the United Nations role and should be studied in depth. We are convinced of the great importance of examining with extreme care the cultural diversity of Member States in order to know each other better, but at the same time understand the profound reasons why, despite our diversity, we are all Member States of a unique universal Organization: the United Nations.

Support and respect for the San Francisco Charter is undoubtedly the starting point of any responsible dialogue. The Government of Uruguay will contribute its ideas and initiatives, joining in the efforts of all delegations to improve the international habitat through understanding and tolerance of peoples and ideas.

Without prejudice to the important progress made towards the establishment of a normative system against the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, Uruguay considers it essential to take new steps in this direction through the universalization of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), whose norms must be recognized and accepted by all States.

The abusive use of light weapons or small arms — a subject of great debate — whose uncontrolled proliferation is reaching unacceptable levels, with devastating effects, in some cases worse than those caused by weapons of massive destruction, is a field in which the United Nations must play a fundamental role, as already reflected in the convening of an international conference to deal with the illicit traffic in small arms, a conference which Uruguay firmly supports.

My country strongly believes in the need to replace the "culture of conflict" with a "culture of peace", so that, as wisely stated by the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, "As the twentieth century witnessed the creation of nuclear weapons, the twenty-first century will see their destruction". The entry into force last March of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is an auspicious sign.

A most significant milestone in the endless search for effective international ways to protect human rights was the signing of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome in July 1998, during the same year in which the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was celebrated. Uruguay is participating and will continue to participate seriously in the elaboration of complementary rules and procedural provisions to give the Court the basic elements to guarantee that it can work properly. When that process is completed the matter will come before our legislative bodies for consideration, in accordance with our Constitution.

In conclusion, the topics that concern and will continue to concern the United Nations are multiple and diverse. At this very moment, for example, an instrument that has shown its effectiveness on various occasions is being employed again: the peacekeeping operation. I refer here to the one taking place in East Timor, with the prime goal of ensuring that the mandate of the Timorese people is implemented, and of preserving the lives and physical integrity of that people.

Naturally, the environment, which is under attack, paradoxically as much by unregulated over-development as by poverty, will continue to be on the Organization's agenda, as well as the topic of population and development.

But perhaps the essential need is to make the maximum effort to make the United Nations the point of reference for all States, the most powerful and the weakest — the former so that they yield to the international order and the latter so that they adjust to it, and find in the Organization their best shield. For all States it means access to a modernity that will develop them and make them part of the current technical innovation, which is supported by the information revolution through which all of us, in one way or another, will be introduced to the coming century.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The next speaker is His Excellency The Honourable Lakshman Kadirgamar, Member of Parliament and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kadirgamar (Sri Lanka): Allow me first to extend to our President's distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Didier Opertti, Foreign Minister of Uruguay, President of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, our gratitude for the excellent manner in which he conducted the work of the previous session.

Allow me also to offer to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga the congratulations and warmest good wishes of the Government and the people of Sri Lanka on their election to membership of the General Assembly of the United Nations. We welcome them and assure them of our unstinted support as they take up their places in the Assembly of nations.

Our President's well-deserved election to the chair of this historic final session of the General Assembly of the United Nations for the twentieth century gives us great pleasure. Many of us, Foreign Ministers, have known him well over the years. We have worked with him, and we have greatly admired the energy and dedication that he has brought to the performance of his duties as the Permanent Representative of his country. The developing countries in particular have cause to remember with gratitude the role he has played in the deliberations of the Non-Aligned Movement and the G-77. He brings to his office wide experience of the systems and practices of the United Nations. He also brings to his office a high degree of sensitivity to the important issues of the day.

I noticed with keen interest that in his opening statement to the Assembly the President referred in considerable detail to the problem of child soldiers. This reference was particularly heartening to me as I had, on the basis of the Graca Machel report, first brought the issue of child soldiers to the attention of the Assembly in the course of my address in 1997. In Sri Lanka a rebel group has for several years been conscripting children, even as young as 10, for battle. Even worse, it has been making children, girls and boys, into suicide bombers, thus creating a horrible new phenomenon of depravity and cruelty that the world has never seen before. If the conscience of the world is not outraged by the tragic fate of these children in my country, then nothing will move us to action in defence of the young and the helpless anywhere. In his opening address to the General Asse[illegible], the President referred to the boast of the "soulless recruiters" that children

> "are numerous and readily available, more malleable and impressionable, learn quickly, are small and agile, and quite simply require less food and supplies than adults".

He described their fate as "horrendous" and said that in his view it

> "demands that the United Nations show renewed commitment and redouble its efforts as the repository of humanity's conscience and social justice in the world." (*A/54/PV.1*)

The President referred to the work being done by inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations to save children, and exhorted them to

> "continue to blame and shame Governments for not doing enough to protect our children's lives and their future." (*ibid*)

But in some countries Governments are completely blameless. In Sri Lanka no Government, either before independence 50 years ago or after, has ever recruited children under 18 years of age into the armed forces. In my country it is only the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that resorts to this abominable practice. These rebel groups are beyond the pale of the law. They acknowledge no international conventions. They are not answerable to any international body. And yet they must be brought to book. Some of them, the LTTE included, operate with impunity in certain countries, wearing the innocent garb of charitable, religious or social organizations. They collect money for ostensibly anodyne purposes. But in fact the money goes to buy weapons for war. And, in truth, host Governments which provide shelter to these organizations under the umbrella of liberal laws of asylum and immigration know, or could easily find out, that those moneys are going to fuel the very war into which young children are being dragooned. These Governments adopt as their explanation for inaction the impeccable excuse that they do not have laws under which fund-raising for terrorist purposes can be punished. This is true, but it will soon cease to be true when the convention for the suppression of the financing of terrorism is adopted -- we hope and pray — at this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, requiring all signatory States to enact domestic legislation in keeping with the provisions of the convention.

The Secretary-General in his report (S/1999/957) to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict has recommended that the Security Council urge Member States to support the proposal to raise the minimum age for recruitment and participation in hostilities to 18, and demand that non-State actors involved in conflict not use children below the age of 18 in hostilities, or face the imposition of targeted sanctions if they do not comply. One of the most effective sanctions would be the proscription of such organizations in countries where they presently collect money without let or hindrance, or their being named terrorist organizations, as by the United States of America, for instance, and the consequent illegalization of their activities.

Since 1997 there has been considerable progress on the question of child soldiers. The issue is now on centre stage. Regional conferences have been held, and a world conference is to be held next year. The office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict is operational. A growing number of countries refer to this issue in the General Assembly and at other forums. Most recently the Foreign Ministers of the Nordic Countries roundly condemned the practice and pledged their support for its eradication. The Security Council has unanimously adopted its first-ever resolution on the plight of children. The first decade of the next millennium has been designated the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. And the President stated that he would make it his business to add his "voice and devotion to" the

> "laudable efforts to make the twenty-first century one of love and security for every child in the world." (*ibid*)

In Sri Lanka we have decided to set up a rehabilitation centre for the children who desert the rebel army. The task of restoring them to health and normalcy is a daunting one. It is a task for which we can certainly use all the help we can get from those who have experience in that field.

My plea to the General Assembly today, two years after I first brought up the question of child soldiers, is that we must proceed with the utmost dispatch to rescue these children from their fate. They are already scarred; if we do not act quickly they will be scarred beyond redemption.

We leave the twentieth century with many spectacular achievements behind us. But let us make no mistake — we move into the twenty-first century carrying with us old, intractable problems that have been with us since the dawn of time. As the present century draws to a close, new problems of unparalleled menace and danger have emerged. They will undoubtedly occupy our attention well into the next century.

Poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, hunger, unemployment, uncontrolled urbanization, the growth of mega cities — these are old problems which deeply affect over half of humanity.

We have not addressed these problems with sufficient vigour over the past decades. While the United Nations systems were set up to tackle these problems, the capacity of the system to deliver results has been grossly inadequate.

The challenge of fighting human poverty must necessarily continue to have the highest priority. The poor continue to become poorer, remaining deprived of the basic necessities of life. This is morally outrageous in

an era of abundance and conspicuous consumption. Poverty degrades humanity and is a threat to the most basic of all human rights. The onus is on us to unite, to wage a moral war, to eliminate the scourge of poverty from our midst.

Sri Lanka is of the view that any development agenda of the future must contain a social dimension and assure protection to the most vulnerable elements of our society. It is in this regard that the international community must move beyond the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. By revising the criteria of classification, we would expand the number of countries that could be helped towards achieving meaningful reduction in both the stock of debt and its servicing. Debt relief and official development assistance, which has been dwindling in recent years, should be restored to its former levels, void of conditionality, at least for the least developed countries. A positive step would be the cancellation of their foreign debt. This would help release their very limited resources for social and poverty alleviation programmes. They must be urgently put on the path to sustainable development, if they are to survive. Though relieving these countries of a major portion of their debt burden is a commendable step, it is equally important to ensure that they do not relapse into the poverty trap.

The time has come for the countries of the South to formulate an effective and implementable economic agenda. The recommendations of the Non-Aligned Movement ad hoc panel of economists are of primary importance in organizing the substantive work of the agenda for the South. They include the need for the elaboration and regular updating of the developing countries' agenda; development of a networking system between countries of the South, involving specialists and researchers in the various fields of importance; an economic coordination scheme to help identify and analyse aspects of international economic and trade-related issues; and the assembling and launching of expert groups, which could mobilize those national and inter-South institutions, like the South Centre in Geneva.

The South Centre could be a possible coordinating mechanism, which could facilitate the implementation of the South agenda. With the increased marginalization of developing countries in matters of international finance and trade, it is imperative that we urgently put in place a coordinating mechanism to implement the recommendations made by the ad hoc panel of economists.

The general thrust of globalization and liberalization of the international economy has now become irreversible. The growing linkages between countries, the opening up of markets, the spread of investments, the impact of technology on standardizing products, the shrinking of distances and the speed of modern communications, offer new windows of opportunity for developing countries, especially if their positive aspects are seized upon and their pitfalls avoided. The task facing us in the developing world today is one of adapting this twin process to conform to our own specific requirements and priorities. This, in our view, would be the primary objective of an economic agenda of the South in the evolving global economy of the future.

Although there have been significant developments in the world economy under the influence of the doctrine of globalization and liberalization, it is imperative to recognize its limitations and drawbacks where developing countries are concerned. We need to grapple with the reality and shake off any feelings of complacency. It is now increasingly evident that the benefits of globalization have by and large bypassed much of the developing world, despite strict adherence to the tenets of the structural adjustment policies. The poorest among us — spanning the continents of Africa, Central America and Asia — have experienced increasing marginalization in the world economy.

Surveying the South, we find it evident that globalization and liberalization have, paradoxically, increased the economic gap between rich and poor countries. This is the conclusion reached in the tenth United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report*. Domestic liberalization measures undertaken by many of the developing countries have also contributed towards a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. A number of countries have recorded some acceleration of economic growth in the wake of liberalization and deregulation. But they have also witnessed a shift in income distribution in favour of those in the upper income groups. Domestic policy reforms undertaken by a large number of developing counties in the direction of liberalization and deregulation have not secured for them a place on the "Globalization Express".

The globalization and liberalization process is unfolding in a manner which gives developing countries little voice in shaping the policy framework that underpins this procedure. The ad hoc panel of economists under the aegis of the Non-Aligned Movement, which was set up on a proposal made by Sri Lanka, has concluded that there is very little opportunity for developing countries to be represented at discussions and

in the councils under which various aspects of the globalization process are assessed, monitored and tailored.

Initial optimism on globalization and liberalization is being replaced by anxiety and concern. The emergent economies in Asia are in crisis, experiencing sharp downward pressures on their currencies and capital markets and experiencing stresses, not only on their economic structures, but also on their social fabric and political processes. Fears of widespread international repercussions have borne fruit, and the impact of contagion is all too evident. A bitter lesson that has become all too obvious is the vulnerability of economies to uncontrolled financial flows of various kinds, particularly those of a speculative nature.

The globalization and liberalization environment contains no safeguards to control and regulate destabilizing forces in a situation in which rapid movements of vast amounts of capital across national borders is a daily reality. The response of the multilateral financial institutions and the major Powers to the East Asian crisis has been ad hoc and *ex post facto*, but the need in the first place was for preventive mechanisms.

In this milieu, Sri Lanka's response has been to maintain as best it could a steady level of economic growth, despite an unfavourable external economic environment. Our capital account transactions have only partially been liberalized. In our view, foreign direct investment should be of a medium or long-term nature in order to discourage excessive outflow of short-term capital during a financial crisis.

It is now virtually established wisdom that the least developed countries have been increasingly marginalized in the globalization and liberalization process. A restructuring of the global financial architecture must include special protection for these most vulnerable segments of our global society. Since a crisis in any one part of the global structure has the power to cause havoc in the rest of the world economy, we must look beyond national solutions to global ones, for both are now irrevocably interlinked.

Sri Lanka, as chair of the Group of 24, has taken a special interest in building a consensus among developing countries on the issues of reforming the global financial architecture, and also on the matter of implementation of World Trade Organization agreements. As a member of regional groupings, such as the Group of 15, the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC), and also as the current chair of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Sri Lanka hopes to play a part in evolving a developing country consensus on this issue and initiating a healthy debate with developed countries, with the hope of establishing a new, dynamic, mutually beneficial international financial architecture. As a part of this effort, we have been active in promoting a South-South dialogue and developing an agenda for the South.

In this connection, I wish to commend the observations of the German Foreign Minister in his speech to the Assembly a few days ago. He said:

> "The United Nations third major task alongside peacekeeping and promoting human rights in the coming century will be to bring about a reconciliation between rich and poor countries ... The development of the poorer and the poorest countries must not be left to the invisible hand of the global market ... The rich countries have a responsibility to help poor countries take advantage of globalization and enable them to have a fairer share of the world economy by assisting them with internal reforms and by opening up markets ... Development cooperation in the broadest sense must become one of the United Nations core tasks to a greater degree than hitherto. Science and technology are geared far too much to the problems of rich countries." (*A/54/PV.8*)

The phenomenon of nations pooling their resources and strengths, either for collective security or economic development, has been a particular phenomenon of the second half of this century. South Asia has been no exception, the only difference being that the process of regional cooperation commenced relatively late — just 15 years ago — in comparison to other parts of the world. We were also clear from the very outset that our endeavours were targeted solely for economic and social development.

The early phase of regional cooperation in South Asia required the building of the necessary institutional capacities of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Once these capacities were in place, we began during the last decade to work on the core issues of economic and commercial cooperation.

We have made some progress in tariff liberalization in South Asia under the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement. This progress has given us the confidence to contemplate the more ambitious task of establishing a regional free-trade area. At the SAARC Summit in Colombo hosted by Sri Lanka last year, a decision was taken, and thereafter implemented, to begin drafting the legal treaty for a free-trade regime.

The Colombo Summit also manifested our determination as a region to equip ourselves to maximize the opportunities afforded by the process of globalization. Our Commerce Ministers have been meeting regularly to prepare for the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Meeting in Seattle. We will be spelling out in Seattle our views on the achievements so far of the multilateral trading system that has now been put in place and the course corrections we believe are required. We have also networked our central banks and finance Ministries since the Colombo Summit, to strengthen our capacities to anticipate and cope with developments in the international financial system.

The economic focus of our regional cooperation has not made us unmindful of our other primary objective, namely of social advancement for our region. The challenges our region faces are many. They relate to education, the empowerment of women, health and population issues, and so on. We are trying to evolve a link between regional goals and national programmes in the social sector through a depoliticized common vision. To this end we have, again after the Colombo Summit, commenced work on a Social Charter for South Asia.

The gains we have made in regional cooperation in South Asia are certainly not the material of which sensational headlines are made. In fact, they may even have gone unnoticed in some quarters. Yet we in South Asia know that our achievements are incremental, durable and long-lasting. Whatever may be the burdens imposed by history on our region, our common aspiration for the development and welfare of our peoples brings the Governments of South Asia together in collective endeavour. Our organization has an inherent strength and resilience that has enabled it to weather serious crises in relations between some of our members. It has emerged stronger after each such test of its capacity for collective action.

Among the new problems of unparalleled menace and danger that have emerged towards the close of the present century are heightened terrorist activities in many countries and ever-proliferating criminal activities in the areas of narcotics, human trafficking and arms smuggling. Every time I have spoken from this rostrum, I have argued that terrorism must be tackled collectively if it is to be tackled effectively at all. In earlier years this plea seemed to fall on deaf ears. But a rash of terrorist bombings in the West galvanized the rich and powerful countries into action. Today we have one Convention in place and two others under consideration at this very session. I am content this year merely to reiterate my plea that there should be no relaxation in the fight against terrorism. I urge other countries, particularly in the West, to follow the lead of the United States of America in enacting legislation to outlaw terrorist organizations.

In the unfolding debate on the stand-off between state sovereignty and the rights of individuals being subjected to massive human-rights violations, we must be careful to see that terrorist organizations do not reap the benefit of misplaced sympathy in situations of civil conflict. Those who resort to terror in pursuit of their political objectives must never be permitted or encouraged to believe that unremitting terror will ultimately bring its reward in recognition and results. On the contrary, it is only the recognition that a campaign of terror will put its exponents beyond the pale of civilized discourse that will persuade terrorists to seek other ways of gaining a hearing.

At the close of this century it is relevant to ask of ourselves this question: do moral considerations any longer inspire or motivate our actions, or have we been completely overtaken by pragmatic considerations reflected in our respective national interests, subjectively defined?

I would like, in this context, to make an observation. We have all heard the familiar jibe that a diplomat is someone who is paid to lie abroad for his country. Indeed, foreign relations and foreign policy have always had the reputation of being somewhat amoral, the object being to secure some national advantage, with the morality of the end, or of the means used to secure the end, being relatively unimportant. But the consequences of this approach for international relations have been deplorable. The Charter of the United Nations commences with these memorable words:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

"to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

"to establish conditions under which respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

"to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

One has only to listen to these words to realize that the 54 years that have elapsed since they were first stated have brought serious disappointments. Not only has the world experienced numerous wars, but nations and peoples have experienced many kinds of immoral pressures and intimidation. Social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom have, for many nations, been an ever-receding mirage. It is clear that these noble aspirations need some backing, some stiffening, in their implementation.

Some 2,500 years ago a great teacher was born in Asia. He was born a prince. He renounced the world and roamed the forests in search of truth until he received enlightenment. Let me recall that Buddhism was first established in the central plain of the River Ganges, just south of the Himalayas. From that beginning, at one time or another in the course of its history, the message of the Enlightened One spread to large areas of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, to Sri Lanka, China and Japan, to Indonesia, Korea, Laos and Viet Nam, and to Myanmar and Thailand. I state this not with any sense of triumphalism, but to note that this enormous expansion took place in peace. No battles were fought, no cities besieged and no crusades commenced to further the expansion of Buddhism. And when, in accordance with the Buddha's teaching that all things are impermanent, the tide receded, no battles were fought, no cities besieged and no crusades commenced to stem that tide. For all of us who are concerned with statecraft, this holds a fundamental lesson.

I would like to quote in this connection from the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka, who, as the Assembly knows, underwent a radical change of heart through contact with the Dhamma. In his often-quoted thirteenth rock edict at Kalsi, he proclaimed:

"And for the following purpose has this rescript on morality been written, namely, in order that the sons and grandsons who may be born to me should not think that a fresh conquest ought to be made; that, if a conquest does please them, they should take pleasure in mercy and light punishments, and that they should regard the conquest by morality as the only true conquest"

Not only the freedom of thought, but also the tolerance allowed by the Buddha is astonishing to the student of the history of religions. Asoka, following this noble example of tolerance and understanding, honoured and supported all other religions in his vast empire.

The Buddha was just as clear on politics, war and peace. It is well-known that Buddhism advocates and preaches non-violence and peace as its universal message and does not approve of any kind of violence or destruction of life. According to Buddhism, there is nothing that can be called a "just war", which is only a false term coined and put into circulation to justify and excuse hatred, cruelty, violence and massacre. Who decides what is just or unjust? The mighty and the victorious are "just" and the weak and the defeated are "unjust". Buddhism does not accept this position.

As the Buddha says:

"The victor breeds hatred and the defeated lies down in misery. He who renounces both victory and defeat is happy and peaceful".

The only conquest that brings peace and happiness is self-conquest:

"One may conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself — only one — is the greatest of the conquerors."

Buddhist philosophy contains much more of relevance to statesmen. In the past decade the observance of human rights has been a source of great concern and debate in international forums. In this connection, I would like to quote the words of a scholar who has examined the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article by article, from a Buddhist perspective. He said:

"The importance of this Declaration as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations is now acknowledged everywhere. From the religious angle, it is possible to state that in this Declaration lie enshrined certain values and norms emphasized by the major religions of the world.

Though not directly expressed, the basic principles of the Declaration are supported and reinforced by these religious traditions, and among them the contribution of the Buddhist tradition, to say the least, is quite outstanding".

Today the teachings of the Buddha are studied and practised worldwide, and nowhere more avidly than in the West. It is said that there are over 150 million known adherents of Buddhism in the world today. But if one took into account the vast uncounted numbers of those who practise Buddhism, that figure would be immensely higher.

Allow me, therefore, to suggest to this Assembly that as the third millennium of human history opens it would be fitting to recall the immense contribution to the understanding of the human condition that the teachings of the Buddha made 2,500 years ago. I suggest further that it would be appropriate to honour the Buddha by declaring that Wesak, the sacred day for Buddhists the world over, be observed as a special day by the United Nations. Wesak marks the three most important events in the life of the Buddha: his birth, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away, all occurring on the full-moon day of the month of May. This was the recommendation made by an international Buddhist conference held in Colombo last November and attended by delegates from 26 countries. With the permission of the President, a draft resolution to this effect, sponsored by a number of countries, will be introduced in the General Assembly at its current session. The Government of Sri Lanka commends this draft resolution to the attention of the General Assembly.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Her Excellency Mrs. Rosario Green, to whom I give the floor.

Mrs. Green (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the election of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Mexico knows him as an experienced diplomat whose contribution will guarantee that our work strengthens the ability of the United Nations to face the challenges of the next century. In welcoming his election, we pay tribute to the constructive role Namibia plays on the international stage.

My delegation would also like to place on record its appreciation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his outstanding guidance of the fifty-third session.

I wish also to express the satisfaction of Mexico at the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to membership of the Organization. Their presence among us strengthens universality, the very essence of the United Nations.

My delegation is participating in this session with the will to negotiate and the desire to cooperate that have always characterized Mexico's foreign policy. We are convinced that the proposals we make and results we achieve will contribute to designing the international order of the twenty-first century; we shall be an active participant in the debate.

Now more than ever it seem essential that we review the system we devised at San Francisco in the light of our experiences over the past 54 years and of the progress achieved in the field of international law. In that review we must ensure that the interests of all Member States are taken into account in line with the Charter principle of the sovereign equality of States.

Mexico is proud of its multilateral outlook. My country has always seen the United Nations as the ideal forum to propose, negotiate and agree on solutions and common strategies that will enable us to face our collective challenges. We Mexicans are convinced that it is imperative to spare no effort to make our Organization the primary forum for generating comprehensive policies, policies that guarantee lasting peace and security, and the development and welfare of all peoples on earth.

As it does every year, the General Assembly has a broad and complex agenda before it at this session. I wish therefore to focus my statement on three topics that I consider to be of paramount importance for the future of the Organization and of the community of nations: world peace and security; international cooperation in the field of natural disasters; and the financial architecture of the new century.

The Preamble and Article 1 of the Charter state that fundamental aims of the peoples of the United Nations are to live together in peace and to solve their disputes without resorting to the use of force. The attainment of those aims is our only guarantee if we yearn for a stable and secure international community that reveres friendly relations and goodwill among all peoples and all nations.

We note with growing concern that, far from disappearing, conflicts have multiplied and their nature has changed as a consequence of the reshuffling of forces in the international arena. Today, these ever-proliferating confrontations are to a great extent internal ones, presenting formidable challenges to an Organization conceived to resolve disputes between States. We still lack clear-cut mandates and a defined consensus on how to address this new state of affairs. This often divides us, not on the ultimate goal — peace — but on the means to achieve it. Given the absence of a new political contract that enjoys the support of all Members of the United Nations, Mexico will continue firmly to maintain that the search for solutions to conflicts, whether they be internal or international, must be in conformity with the letter and the spirit of the San Francisco Charter. Its principles cannot be subjected to interpretations varying with circumstances or to unilateral whims. We cannot allow the authority or the legitimacy of the Organization to be damaged. We cannot accept actions that openly contradict the intentions of the founders and that weaken the rights of the community of States.

Mexico has always maintained that the use of force, even when motivated by the loftiest humanitarian impulses, is no solution; to the contrary, it generates further instability, uncertainty and violence. But my country has shown restraint when the Security Council has acted in strict compliance with Chapter VII of the Charter. Even so, the Mexican Government reiterates the value of the peaceful settlement of disputes and firmly rejects the existence of an alleged right to intervene, particularly when it is proclaimed outside the framework of international law.

This is one of the most pressing challenges that we must face as we move towards the new millennium. Essentially, we are striving to give the United Nations the political underpinning that will enable it to face new threats to peace and security in line with the thinking that inspired the authors of the San Francisco Charter. If we fail, we run the risk of eroding international negotiating tools and of doing precisely what we want to avoid: weakening the Organization.

For these reasons, my delegation invites all Member States to begin an exercise in collective thinking that will enable us to solve the dilemma of humanitarian crises caused by internal conflicts on the one hand and of the capability of the United Nations to respond on the other. This must be an exercise in deep thinking that will lead us to lasting solutions, which will both preserve peace and protect the lives and human rights of those involved in conflicts.

Allow me now to turn to another topic that I deem central to the future of the United Nations: international cooperation in the event of natural disaster. In view of the regrettable recurrence of natural disasters, it is urgent to think about a creative and effective international division of labour so that responses by countries, regions and organizations do not constitute isolated efforts or temporary relief. They should instead constitute a comprehensive strategy that will contribute to lasting stability.

We have all witnessed the sad consequences of natural catastrophes. Recent experiences highlight the urgent need for an effective machinery to address more rapidly and more fully the needs of affected populations. These experiences show also that at the very outset of the tragedy it is essential to mobilize broader support efforts to contribute to full recovery in the shortest possible time.

At the regional level, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have taken important steps that serve as an example of the proposed new division of labour to deal with natural disasters. In the declaration on technical cooperation for the prevention and relief of natural disasters adopted at the summit meeting of the Permanent Mechanism for Political Consultation and Concertation (Rio Group), held in Mexico City in May, we undertook the commitment "to promote permanent measures of technical cooperation on every phase of natural disasters". This marks significant progress in the field of international cooperation. It aims not only to repair the damage but also to include preventive measures, and is designed to ensure assistance not only at the time of crisis but also during the reconstruction period.

Likewise, during their summit, held in June 1999 at Rio de Janeiro, heads of State or Government of Latin America and the Caribbean and of the European Union decided to launch an important programme of cooperation in the sphere of environmental and natural disasters. Its goal is to help improve the capacity of the most vulnerable nations of both regions so we can prevent and deal with disasters. To that end, they agreed to establish an appropriate system of international assistance at all phases from prevention and early warning to emergency assistance and mitigation, without neglecting rehabilitation and reconstruction.

My delegation is convinced that these experiences deserve to be considered by this Assembly so that their merits may be assessed and disseminated throughout the world. The United Nations must play a central role in making this strategy international. It is urgent to have national listings of civil defence organizations with updated inventories of available resources to help in disasters, and handbooks to guide us in the effective management of international cooperation. In other words, the Organization must respond in terms of who will provide international cooperation when natural disasters strike, what they will provide, and how they will provide it.

Lastly, I would like to refer to the financial architecture of the new century. A year ago, in this same forum, I voiced the concern of Mexico about the harmful effects that financial crises have on our societies. At that time, I proposed that the Member States, coordinated by the Secretary-General, should undertake to reflect on how to improve our early-warning capacity in order to prevent and confront in a timely fashion the occurrence and proliferation of financial crises. This initiative found support in resolution 53/172, entitled "The financial crisis and its impact on growth and development, especially in the developing countries".

Subsequently, we proposed to the Secretary-General the undertaking of an effort at the regional level in Latin America and the Caribbean as part of a broader endeavour that will have to involve other areas, including developed countries and the international financial agencies.

Earlier this month, in close collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, we held a meeting in Mexico City under the heading "Towards a stable and predictable international financial system linked to social development." High-level Government officials of the countries of our region participated, as well as specialists and prominent officials of multilateral institutions working in financial and social fields.

At that meeting, we undertook an in-depth analysis of the international financial architecture and its connection to the social development of our peoples. We also reaffirmed our conviction that it is urgent and necessary to define a new world financial scheme that includes a social dimension. The conclusions of that regional meeting have been conveyed to the Secretary-General, and I would like refer to just a few of them.

First, we participants expressed our concern over the fact that once the most visible effects of the crisis are overcome, we observe a dangerous attitude of complacency. The countries of the region are convinced that a renewed effort is required in order to strengthen the global financial system, and we reaffirmed our commitment to actively participate in this task.

Secondly, we emphasized the need to have a stable, transparent, predictable, organized and secure international financial system. To this end, we, the various participants must accept and fulfil our respective responsibilities. The international financial agencies must redesign their policies in order to respond to the great challenges created by financial markets. They must develop early-warning mechanisms and expand their resources to help economies in trouble in a timely and appropriate way. For their part, countries must commit themselves to following macroeconomic policies that lead to growth and social justice. They must recognize, in order to remedy the problem, the part played in the crisis by the absence of adequate supervision and regulation of national banking systems. A solid banking system is essential to protect a country from speculative movements of capital.

Thirdly, we recognized the devastating impact that financial crises have on the social situation and the prospects for development of our countries. In this respect, we expressed the need to advance towards a financial architecture that reconciles the economy with society and international finance with sustained social development. We reaffirmed in this sense our absolute conviction that sustained growth is the most effective way to reduce inequality and poverty.

Fourthly, we agreed that the ultimate goal of the international development banks must be precisely human development. We deemed it fundamental for those institutions to give high priority to financial support for the formation of basic networks of social protection in times of crisis, without losing sight of the broader objectives of growth and development.

Fifthly, we agreed that the United Nations must play a central role in promoting integrated social development through forging an international consensus that helps support and rebuild the global financial architecture. It is encouraging to learn that in the year 2001 the United Nations will sponsor a high-level meeting on financing development. That will be an ideal opportunity to address

comprehensively the problem of social and human development, including its financial aspect.

Thus, we will follow up on the conclusions and recommendations coming out of the meeting in Mexico, and on those from other meetings and forums, in order to include all actors in the design of the financial architecture for the twenty-first century. We will be attentive to efforts in this direction on the part of Secretary-General.

The United Nations must strengthen its position and its mandate as the principal forum of debate and for seeking consensual solutions that guide the work of the international community in the face of problems and situations that affect us all. It is essential to continue the task of establishing a more democratic and transparent Organization that fully reflects the interests and objectives of its Members and that is a forum that truly represents all of them. I am sure that all of us want a United Nations where fairness and justice reign.

Looking towards the Millennium Assembly, we must continue to foster cooperation and closeness among nations in order to strengthen peace and security, push disarmament ahead, promote development and the struggle against poverty and ensure full respect for international law.

If we are really being overtaken by events in the global arena, we must strengthen our frame of action. If it is necessary to reform our Organization to guarantee its effective performance, let us do so. But let us do so collectively, with respect for the juridical principle of the equality of States. Let us not allow this forum to lose its prestige or its influence. Mexico will not retreat from its commitment to the letter and the spirit of the San Francisco Charter. To the contrary, it will participate actively in the effort to guarantee the vitality of the United Nations in order to build a better world, both for ourselves and for future generations.

This is the aim of the proposals I have made on behalf of the Government that I have the honour to represent.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, His Excellency Mr. Ali Alatas.

Mr. Alatas (Indonesia): On behalf of the Indonesian delegation, I should first like to congratulate my colleague and good friend Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Foreign Minister of Namibia, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We are confident that under his leadership we will achieve substantial progress in our work.

To his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, I convey our sincere appreciation for his able guidance of our work during the last session.

I join other members in paying a tribute to our Secretary-General for his untiring pursuit of the objectives of the United Nations Charter.

On behalf of the Government and people of Indonesia, I extend a warm welcome to Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga on their accession to membership of the United Nations. My delegation looks forward to working closely with them.

Every year at this time, for more than a decade now, I have tried from this rostrum to present Indonesia's views on the state of world affairs and international relations. Today, I could deliver last year's statement, or even that of three years ago, and it would not make much difference because there really has been no significant change.

It is true that there are always a number of positive developments. This year they include the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum signed by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, which raises our hopes for the resumption of the derailed Middle East peace process. They include also the Lomé Peace Agreement on Sierra Leone; the Framework Agreement on the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia; the Ceasefire Agreement on the Democratic Republic of the Congo; some progress in the rehabilitation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the resolution of the stalemate over the Lockerbie incident. Closer to home, there have been the signing of the 5 May 1999 Agreements reached in New York and the implementation of the historic popular consultation in East Timor which — although, most unfortunately, its aftermath was marred by violence — remains an important, positive development. These are all encouraging steps in a long journey towards just and durable solutions.

In the economic field, investor confidence is beginning to trickle back into the Asian economies severely hit by the financial and economic crisis. This return of confidence and the positive signs in the affected economies — such as stability of currencies and lower interest rates — could be the first firm indications of a

recovery. Recently the G-8 decided to ease the debt burden of the poorest countries by expanding the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. This will help the poorest countries get back on the road of development.

But ours is still an essentially brutal world. In many places, wanton violence and armed conflicts persist, often bringing about humanitarian disaster. In spite of the presence of a United Nations peacekeeping force, Serbs and Albanian Kosovars are still shooting each other in Kosovo. In Afghanistan, dialogue has been abandoned and once more the warring factions have taken to the battlefield. In South Asia, an uneasy ceasefire reigns over the line of control between two neighbouring States with nuclear-weapon capability. Meanwhile, in the backwaters and slums of the developing world, in the ghettos of the industrialized countries, hundreds of millions fight a desperate war against poverty, ignorance and disease. There has as yet been no fulfilment of a hope we all share, a hope to which we have clung for nigh on a century.

A hundred years ago, electricity was just beginning to light up the cities of the world, the commercial manufacture of horseless carriages had just begun and the pioneers of air travel were taking off in crude flying machines. But it was beyond question even then that enormous power called science and technology had been placed in the hands of humankind. It was clear even then that the prudent use of such power could solve the problem of poverty that for millenniums people accepted and suffered as an inevitable part of the human condition.

Since then, unfortunately, that power has been used instead to enlarge humankind's capacity to kill and destroy. That terrible capacity was amply demonstrated in two world wars that levelled cities and decimated populations in Europe and Asia. In time of peace, science and technology have made it possible for one part of humanity to adopt an irresponsible lifestyle and patterns of production and consumption that ravage the fragile ecology of this planet while teeming millions, in the squalor of poverty, driven by the pangs of hunger, are tearing their environment apart in a desperate bid to survive.

Five decades ago, the human race teetered on the brink of a nuclear holocaust, but we were able to postpone the effective end of history because between us and the precipice stood the one shining achievement of humanity in a violent century, the United Nations. Founded in the wake of the Second World War as a forum for maintaining security, resolving conflicts and serving development, the United Nations is, whatever its flaws, a masterpiece of human reason.

It has not achieved its finest promise of global peace, nor has it significantly curbed poverty. Still, it has managed to save us from the horrors of yet another world war, one fought with nuclear weapons. And together with its specialized agencies and related institutions, it is carrying out an immense array of activities in support of economic development and social progress; these are touching every aspect of people's lives all over the world, and thus at least keep hopes alive.

But even the very instrument of our salvation is not spared our recklessness: the United Nations has been allowed to go bankrupt at a time when so much more is demanded of it as the central mechanism and catalyst for multilateral cooperation. Its organs should be working in harmony and complementing one another: instead, we have the spectacle of a Security Council — when not paralysed by the veto of a permanent member — venturing to take over the work of other United Nations organs in such fields as human rights, democracy and humanitarian aid. The unhappy truth is that the inequities, imbalances and discrimination in international relations that the United Nations was supposed to cure have infected its own vital organs and processes.

This is true not only of the United Nations itself but also of related multilateral institutions. This is why it has been so difficult to reform, democratize and empower the United Nations, and so difficult to make the membership of the Security Council truly reflect the political, economic and demographic realities of the world today.

Although the work of the Council is focused on conflict situations that are mostly in the developing world, developing countries are woefully under-represented on the Council.

For the same reason, nuclear disarmament has achieved no substantial progress in recent years. In fact, the nuclear arms race has surged along as countries seek to join and enjoy the dubious privileges of being nuclear-weapon States. The world thus remains in danger of nuclear self-destruction.

The same situation obtains in multilateral economic forums. They, too, have become afflicted with the inequities and imbalances they are meant to rectify. The introduction of irrelevant social issues and undue emphasis on unfettered markets in these forums have

brought about the neglect of core development issues, such as international cooperation for development, the need for non-commercial financial flows and the necessity of differential treatment for developing countries.

Thus, the international agenda has been steered by the desire of developed countries to open doors for their foreign investments, private capital flows and exports. This has led to the eclipse of development as a common goal and a common responsibility of developed and developing nations. It has engendered a tendency to forget commitments reached at global conferences on environment and development, social development, population and development, women and development, habitat and food.

Just over a decade ago, with the barriers of the cold war broken down, science and technology unlocked the awesome force of globalization. This blind force could have served as the chief instrument of a united humankind in a decisive assault against the global problems of poverty and underdevelopment. We could have enlisted it to empower people everywhere and thus broaden participation in governance and productive initiatives. We could have built a more equitable partnership between the developed and the developing world. But at best, the weaker economies were left to the tender mercies of the market. At worst, globalization has been used by the strong to press their advantage over the weak, widening the chasm between rich and poor.

After all this, what can we say to sum up the passing of 100 years? If progress means going to the moon and exploring outer space; if it means the rapid movement of money, goods and people from one continent to another and the delegation of personal initiative to clever machines, then we have made some progress. But if it means the conquest of poverty, the taming of the human penchant for conflict and violence, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of human life, I am afraid that we may be entering the new millennium not really much better off than we were a century ago.

Our tragedy is not in our ignorance, but in the waste of our wisdom. The truth is that we know the solutions to our problems. We know what kind of global partnership it would take to tackle the problems of poverty and underdevelopment. We have spelled out the global measures to initiate in order to prevent the irreversible decay of our environment. And we are aware of what it would take to move the disarmament agenda forward; what kind of representation on the Security Council would make it a true instrument of the whole international community.

But we do not make the necessary decisive moves because these require change — profound and radical change. There must be change not only in our methods, but in the way we look at the world, the way we regard one another and ourselves. That kind of change brings no comfort and poses the deepest challenge to our faith and our courage. Hence, we hesitate. The protracted debates in this Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council, in the Conference on Disarmament and in many other forums are in reality just one long hesitation.

We in Indonesia know how difficult that kind of change can be. In response to the Asian financial and economic crisis, as well as to its social and political impact, we have begun to reform our social, economic and political institutions. New laws are being passed, new ways are being tried to give our people the widest opportunity to participate in the making of decisions that affect their lives, to level the economic playing fields and to earn the confidence of our foreign partners.

The Government has taken a long, hard look at itself and its responsibilities today. In the case of East Timor, our responsibility has changed. Twenty-four years ago, it was our responsibility to accept the Territory as a province of our Republic in order to stop ongoing fratricidal carnage after a disastrously bungled decolonization process; to accommodate the desire of the majority of East Timorese at that time to seek freedom and sanctuary through integration with our Republic; and to contribute to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. We accepted that responsibility and additional burden, although we had never laid claim to that half-island, as it was not a part of the Dutch East Indies out of which the Indonesian nation evolved. Today our responsibility and our commitment are to help make possible the fulfilment of the newly expressed will of the majority of East Timorese to seek a new destiny outside the Indonesian Republic. We will abide by that responsibility and commitment and at the same time ensure that the parting of ways will proceed honourably, peacefully and amicably.

In this process of change, not only in East Timor but also throughout our national life and in our relations with our friends, we have not had an easy time. We have had more than our share of setbacks, frustrations and mistakes. In the depths of every disappointment, we have had to summon the courage to persevere, to start all over again whenever necessary, because there is no alternative acceptable to our people. We do pray for the courage to change, but not for ourselves alone.

For the solutions to the global problems of our time demand a fortitude on the part of nations that is strong enough to break the doubts, the prejudices, the sophistry and the apathy that have hardened with the passing of decades. That means the courage to take action where we have only paid lip-service. It also means the courage to recognize that many of our problems are complex and demand more creativity from us than we have so far demonstrated.

For instance, we fully agree that massive and systematic violations of human rights, wherever they take place, should not be tolerated or condoned. But we cannot agree that this problem can be solved only by sacrificing the principle of national sovereignty and sovereign equality among nations. There must be a solution that does not threaten to demolish a principle on which the United Nations itself was founded. Let us have the intellectual courage to look for that solution and be willing to make any sacrifice to attain it, except the sacrifice of our principles.

If many of us have grown cynical, I believe that it is not out of arrogance, but out of fear of the consequences of change, the loss of some privilege or advantage over another, or out of fear of futility and failure. We can overcome these fears because they are but shadows on the wall; they have no substance. There will be failures and there will be setbacks, but if what we set out to do is worthwhile, and nothing is more worthwhile than the perpetuation of humankind, we will succeed.

Let us now all act in consonance with our commitments to the United Nations Charter; to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); to Agenda 21; to the Uruguay Round and the World Trade Organization (WTO); to all agreements on international financial flows for development; on cooperation on human rights; on the eradication of all forms of discrimination. We cannot bring all of these to fruition in a single day, and some of them not even in a full decade, but if we all do that today, it will be enough to start with.

If we keep building on that to achieve something significant, we engender encouragement. We add to the fund of courage that the world needs to become a better one. And that fund of courage is all it will take for humanity to make an auspicious entry into the next millennium.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency Mr. Ismail Cem.

Mr. Cem (Turkey): Mr. President, the session of the General Assembly over which you are presiding marks the last to be held this century. We are about to turn a new leaf in history. It is, therefore, a time for reflection, a time to reap our lessons and draw our conclusions. It is also a time to reorganize our goals, priorities and our agenda for the next century.

Therefore, there is a recurrent theme throughout this session. We all try to assess what we have achieved and where we have failed in the twentieth century. As we look back on our performance, we observe that within every success story, we also somehow had our failures.

The twentieth century has witnessed unprecedented scientific progress. These achievements, however, were not used solely to advance the human cause and to improve the quality of life. To a very large extent, these scientific and technological innovations were also used as instruments for the destruction of life. Throughout the century, there was an enormous accumulation of wealth. But the vast majority of the world's population is deprived of this wealth. Poverty, and sometimes even hunger, is still their fate.

This century has produced great intellectual achievements and depth. But it has also been the stage of distorted ideologies which produced tyrannies and sometimes encouraged practices like ethnic cleansing. In other words, while the twentieth century created technology and generated material and intellectual wealth, it could not organize the means to put them totally to the service of humanity as a whole. This is our failure. This is the challenge we face. This is what we must overcome.

The global issues we face, whether political, economic, social or environmental, will from now on require further intensification of our concerted efforts. As the primary forum for international cooperation, the United Nations will continue to be the focal point of our collective endeavours.

The wealth of experience accumulated by the United Nations, together with the plans of action devised to address the challenges we face, must now be put to more effective use. The millennium summit next year should provide the guidance needed to place our assets to work more efficiently in the twenty-first century.

A little over a month ago, one of the deadliest earthquakes of the century struck the northwest of Turkey. This is the most populous region of my country. The devastating quake claimed more than 15,000 lives, and thrice as many were wounded. It left about half a million people homeless. We have, undoubtedly, derived great fortitude from the exemplary display of solidarity and the swift response of the international community. The best qualities of human nature were at work: sharing the other's agony and lending a hand to help heal and to reconstruct.

I would like to convey the gratitude of the Government and the people of Turkey to all Members, the international community, the United Nations system, along with the numerous volunteers and individuals who stood with us at our most trying hour.

We express our deep feelings of sympathy for and solidarity with those affected by the earthquake near Taipei. In the face of the recent wave of earthquakes, we believe this Organization can take a further step with regard to natural disasters. This would be in keeping with the greater role of the United Nations in our lives. That is why my country, together with our neighbour Greece, which also suffered a similar calamity recently, is introducing a draft resolution to the General Assembly. This was eloquently announced by my Greek counterpart, George Papandreou, yesterday in the General Assembly. We hope that it will receive Members' support.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, Turkey looks forward to enhancing its contribution to international peace and stability. At the epicentre of Eurasia, it aspires to broaden the scope of cooperation and prosperity, while it continues in its traditional role of connecting continents and civilizations.

More specifically, Turkey is actively involved in the efforts to secure peace and stability in the Balkans, the Middle East, the southern Caucasus region and Central Asia. We also partake in their democratic and economic development efforts. Turkey enjoys the vast potential of historical and cultural affinities with many of the countries in the Caucasus region and Central Asia. We will work for the resolution of the various conflicts in the region and continue to foster ever closer relations with all of them.

Cooperation can rapidly lead the peoples of this region to higher levels of wealth and prosperity. Central Asia will certainly witness tremendous economic development, given its rich human and natural resources. Turkey, lying at the hub, will become an energy terminal, connecting in more ways than one, the wealth and resources of Eurasia. We see the mega-projects of the next century realized in our country and our region.

We are committed to the vision of a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future in south-eastern Europe. We will continue to bring forth our resources and contributions to that end. The need for a large-scale and long-term stabilization and reconstruction programme for the entire region, and more urgently for Kosovo, is evident. We therefore welcome the stability pact for South-Eastern Europe. In this context, it is important that the agreements and arrangements on Kosovo are fully implemented, along with the continuation of support and assistance to Albania and Macedonia.

As the wounds of the Bosnian tragedy are yet to be healed, the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement must be strictly observed and implemented.

The tragedies in the Balkans have taught us to be absolutely cautious and balanced in addressing conflict, whether ethnic or otherwise. We do not have the luxury of acting upon selective memory or one-sided preferences. We cannot afford to impose solutions that do not correspond to the realities and to the aspirations of the peoples concerned.

A case in point is Cyprus. Until 1974 the Turkish Cypriots suffered a great deal in protecting their legitimate rights and interests. There can be no return to those dark days. A just and lasting compromise in Cyprus today can only be based upon the existing realities. There are two separate peoples, two separate States in Cyprus. These two States should be able to solve their differences through their own free will. In the meantime, there could be steps to improve the atmosphere between the two sides by lifting the unjust embargo on the Turkish Cypriots and by also adopting deconfrontational measures, as proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General.

On our part, we believe that the confederation proposal provides the basis for a realistic and viable settlement in Cyprus.

We are encouraged by the recent developments in the Middle East peace process. Once mutual tolerance and understanding start to fully reign over this region, we believe all nations will display fully their historic economic capabilities and their wisdom. My country will continue to actively support the aim of reaching lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Following an exchange of letters with my Greek counterpart, George Papandreou, about three months ago, our two countries, Turkey and Greece, initiated joint committees to work on specific issues. Since then high-ranking officials of the Foreign Ministries held two rounds of meetings and explored the possibilities of promoting cooperation. Committees were mandated in the fields of tourism, environment, trade, culture, regional cooperation and the fight against organized crime, illegal immigration, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Both sides are agreed that there is scope for further cooperation in these fields and identified specific projects to this end. Turkey has the will to carry this process to other spheres of our relationship. Following the earthquakes that struck the two countries, the emotions and solidarity displayed by the Turkish and Greek peoples demonstrate that the two peoples will not accept confrontation and tension as a way of life, and that they prefer friendship. This powerful message of our peoples will help our Governments to move forward with greater confidence.

Turkey will this year host the last summit of the century. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit to be held in Istanbul in November will set the stage for important decisions. The outcome will play a significant role in shaping the future security and cooperation architecture in the Eurasian landscape.

Our political resolve to promote peace and stability over such a wide horizon is on record. Given the opportunity, we are prepared to take upon ourselves even greater responsibilities.

Turkey has presented its candidature for membership on the United Nations Security Council for 2001-2002. We want to contribute to the making of the next millennium as a member of the Council. We ask for Members' support.

The compelling lesson to be drawn from the twentieth century is that our highest priority should be the protection of the dignity of humankind and the enhancement of the quality of life. Whether it is to halt aggression, to stop crimes against humanity, to purge societies of racist and xenophobic tendencies, of cultural and religious intolerance, to combat international terrorism, to provide humanitarian assistance, to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor or to secure sustainable economic and social development, we should act as an international coalition — that is, as the United Nations.

Let us make the twenty-first century the new age of nations united for a more humane and prosperous era for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania, His Excellency Mr. Andrei Gabriel Plesu.

Mr. Plesu (Romania): I am greatly pleased to extend my warmest congratulations to our newly elected President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Also, I join previous speakers in expressing our debt of gratitude to the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his able stewardship of the proceedings of the Assembly during the past session.

I welcome the newcomers to the United Nations family, Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga.

It has not been an easy year for our Secretary-General. We all appreciate his wisdom and sense of balance in steering the reform process of the United Nations itself with a firm hand at a time of profound change on the international scene.

Whether we like it or not, globalization is upon us. A satisfactory definition of the term may not be yet available, but we all feel the effects of it: pervasive; subtle or less so; disturbing; sometimes perverse; and, above all, challenging.

The end of a millennium and the advent of a new one is a good time for reflection. It is not just coping with the millennium bug, which may cause our computers to go awry; it is — to use the Secretary General's well polished phrase — a "symbolically compelling moment". It is not for me to answer the question of where we are and where we are heading: the collective wisdom of the United Nations Member States, assisted by academia and, we hope, by civil society too, will take charge of that at the millennium summit next year. I think we must take that event seriously: although we may have a lot to celebrate, we still have a lot more to do, earnestly, pragmatically and effectively.

Like all good things, globalization produces beneficial effects; then again, as happens with most good things, those benefits are not evenly distributed: those who are better equipped to face the challenge of going global will reap its fruits sooner, while those who are not will have to try harder. What I mean is that as we talk about globalization we do not have to indulge ourselves

in slogans or idolatry: globalization involves great benefits, but also great risks. We should not forget that our century first experienced the dark side of globalization: world war. Luckily, it is also globalization — this time in its good sense — that can make it impossible for conflicts to become chronic, because the whole world instantly learns about any local dispute and mobilizes all available energies to identify and implement solutions.

The moral underpinning of globalization is called solidarity. One could say that in its very structures and goals the United Nations anticipated contemporary globalization: the United Nations is all about institutionalized solidarity, and to belong to this Organization means making solidarity the norm of best conduct. Social, political and economic solidarity; cultural, inter-ethnic and regional solidarity; solidarity born out of respect for values, and fostered by goodwill and good faith — these are the ethics that we wish for the forthcoming millennium.

It should be clear that the individual must necessarily be the beneficiary of any form of solidarity: international organizations, States and governments do not acquire legitimacy and cannot be judged otherwise than through their impact on individual destiny. The real man or woman, rather than generic mankind, and the values embodied by the human species, rather than self-serving projects, are the true subjects of politics.

This way of thinking has lately brought up the issue of humanitarian intervention, human rights and reform of the system of international law. This is a sensitive issue and one full of pitfalls. There are those who say that we should not tolerate legal injustice under the pretext of humanitarian intervention. That is true. Similarly, some say that we should tolerate either social injustice nor crime under the pretext of non-interference in domestic affairs. Undoubtedly respect for human rights is primarily the responsibility of national Governments and State institutions. However, if they do not fulfil this task, there should be an instrument capable of enforcing respect for international standards and there is no better instrument for doing so than the United Nations.

Preventing conflicts is a complex undertaking. Unfortunately, we do not always have time to act subtly and imaginatively. We are not doing enough in the field of education in the sense of cultivating values of respect for the integrity of the individual and for his or her right to be different. We do not always understand in time that the most efficient way to fight war and violence is to fight poverty. We do not always know how to distinguish between political manoeuvring and public interest, between national pride and universally valid principles. We must reflect on these things not only when crises are unleashed but instantly calmly and clear-mindedly. There is no simple way of coping with complexity. It requires vision, enlightened foresight, careful planning and hard work.

The revolutionary changes of ten years ago in Central and Eastern Europe and the ensuing process of transition were essentially focused on values — political pluralism, parliamentary democracy, separation of powers, individual freedom, market economy and human rights, including the rights of people belonging to ethnic, religious or other minorities. Those values prevailed because they were right, because they survived in our hearts and minds through decades of totalitarian communist oppression, and because they were embraced by the vast majority of people in our countries.

But shared values themselves are not enough to build a truly prosperous democratic society: they have to be underpinned by an equally coherent set of institutions designed to serve and actually implement those values. The two — values and institutions — are inextricably linked in a functioning democracy, and it is precisely from this linkage that the indispensable ingredient for further progress arises: leadership. That, in a nutshell, is the substance of good governance. We are reminded here of the idea that:

> "The important thing for government is not to do things which individuals are doing already, and to do them a little bit better or a little bit worse, but to do those things which at present are not done at all." [*John Maynard Keynes, "The End of Laissez-Faire"*]

We in Romania, much like those in many other Central and East European countries, have been and still are learning that simple truth the hard way in a difficult and sometimes painful process of transition.

It is in that spirit and in recognition of the international dimension of good governance at a time of global change that the Romanian delegation has submitted a draft code of democratic conduct (A/54/178, annex) for examination by the Assembly this session. The text before the Assembly is the result of extensive consultations and includes meaningful contributions from many quarters based upon the original framework from

the Conferences of New or Restored Democracies. The important — and I would say, novel — thing about this document is that, in addition to listing principles and stating general aims, it also spells out practical modalities for carrying them out in the political, legal, administrative, economic and social spheres. Last but not least, it emphasizes the crucial role of non-institutional players — business communities, unions, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the media — in shaping policies and in building consensus for implementation.

In a changing world, the world Organization itself is also changing. The scope and pace of its reform and adaptation to the new realities and requirements may have been uneven, patchy in some respects and even disappointing, but the process has gained momentum and there are hopeful signs for steady progress in the future. The United Nations is uniquely equipped by its structure and acquired expertise to seek specific rather than standard solutions to specific problems. Every crisis we have had to face in recent years and months had a physiognomy of its own. To be effective, the response must match the challenge in terms of innovative complexity.

In relation to the enlargement of the Security Council membership and its improved performance, we believe that proper consideration should be given to the interests of all regional groups, including the Group of Eastern European States, which has seen the most spectacular rise in numbers over the past three decades.

Romania welcomed the initiative to create the United Nations Stand by Forces High-Readiness Brigade and takes part in it. Recent events across the world have demonstrated the urgent need to make it operational as soon as possible. We have been reminded of this in a most dramatic fashion by the recent events in East Timor. Romanian contingents took part in several United Nations-led and other peacekeeping, peace support and policing operations and are further prepared to improve and diversify their contribution to such activities.

Our cooperation with the United Nations agencies has become better focused and more effective. I should like to mention the importance we attach to the support of the United Nations Development Programme in designing and managing specific, high-priority projects for Romania, notably in public administration, in the preparation of a national strategy for sustainable development and of a local Agenda 21 programme. Further useful work is expected to be done jointly with the World Bank for the formulation of a comprehensive development framework at both the national and the regional level.

The Balkan tragedy has been in the headlines for the whole of this past year. We all had an object lesson on the harm that ethnic and religious intolerance compounded by rabid nationalism can do to an entire region. As so many times in history, it was the innocents that had to suffer most, individuals and nations alike. But we have also learned that determination and prompt action by the international community can make a difference. It is gratifying to note that trans-Atlantic solidarity again passed a crucial test in these past few months. In fact, if we are able to look into the future of the region with a reasonable degree of optimism, it is because we have seen concerted action at work.

The Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe is such proof of a new, bold approach — a comprehensive, forward looking programme which proposes to deal with the entire region with specific action envisaged on three tiers: international security, economic development and democracy and institution-building. Romania has welcomed the plan from the very beginning, is part of it and seriously means to do its utmost to bring it to fruition. It is still early, but three preliminary observations may be in order.

First, the actual participation of the countries in the region and of its immediate neighbours, such as Romania, is crucial for its success.

Secondly, in focusing on the eventual integration of the region as a whole into the European and Atlantic structures, the sequence and content of the steps to be taken should realistically differentiate among the actual requirements and capabilities of each participating country.

Thirdly, besides action at the governmental level, it is vital to secure the active involvement of business interests and the various organizational expressions of civil society in order to give substance and continuity to the whole process.

Almost as an afterthought, I think I should also mention the need for a watchful eye on transparency, applying equally to political decision-making and to procurement procedures, including those practised by the agencies of the United Nations family. This is a legitimately sensitive subject for the countries of the

region, particularly for the companies registered there, and ought to be duly considered as such.

Romania's commitment to its strategic goals of European and Atlantic integration is steady and unwavering. It has passed the acid test of the Kosovo crisis. We are looking forward with confidence and hope to the major decisions which are due to be taken before the year's end and thereafter.

The United Nations may not be perfect, but is perfectible and, after all, is the only world forum available. It is up to us to make it live and deliver. We, the Member States, have to deliver in order to live in a peaceful world. For this I hope and pray.

The Acting President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Dimitrov.

Mr. Dimitrov (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Allow me first of all to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia, for having been elected President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. At the same time, I would like to express my appreciation of and respect for the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the results achieved during his presidency.

Let me also express my deep respect for Secretary-General Kofi Annan, for his excellent leadership of the Organization. I wish to assure him that the Republic of Macedonia is ready to continue to closely cooperate with him.

The Republic of Macedonia welcomes the admission of the new Members — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga — and wishes them success in their contribution to United Nations activities, and at the same time expresses its readiness to establish diplomatic relations with them. Also, I hope that we shall continue the process of establishing diplomatic relations between the Republic of Macedonia — of course, using the constitutional name — and Member States with which we have not yet done so.

On this occasion, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the people of Taiwan on the earthquake that hit the Republic of China on Taiwan, with which the Republic of Macedonia has recently established diplomatic relations.

It is with regret that we have to note that one of the main characteristics of the past year was flagrant and highly risky disrespect for the fundamental values of democratic society. In addition to the major tragedies the world was faced with, we witnessed a growing trend of armed conflicts and internal and external tensions. Concerning the area surrounding the Republic of Macedonia, I would focus on the huge humanitarian crisis that took place in South-Eastern Europe and the heavy consequences which jeopardized the stability and security of the Balkans and beyond in Europe.

The Kosovo crisis had particularly adverse effects on my country. We had to cope with an enormous influx of refugees, numbering more than 360,000, or 18 per cent of the total population. The Republic of Macedonia entered a rather difficult economic, social and political situation that tended to destabilize it, particularly against the background that the international community reacted with insufficient speed and agility. The damage which the Macedonian economy suffered is enormous, amounting to approximately $660 million. A large number of workers were dismissed as a result of lost markets and increased transportation costs. The unemployment rate reached 40 per cent. All of this has negatively affected the already poor economic and social situation. In these circumstances, the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia have demonstrated great humaneness towards the refugees, tolerance and solidarity, but also restraint in the conditions of enormous social, political and economic pressure they were exposed to and whose consequences could have been more dramatic. Finally, we should not forget that there are still 30,000 refugees in the Republic of Macedonia. I urge the Assembly to continue the joint efforts for their safe return to their homes.

At the same time, the peace forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for Kosovo were deployed in the Republic of Macedonia in support of the international efforts for a political resolution of the crisis, as were a large number of international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Macedonia has managed to overcome these hardships, but the consequences are still being felt in the national economy. Financial assistance and support from the international community are indispensable for the recovery of the national economy. It is beyond doubt that compensation for the damage we suffered by making our

national capacities available for the resolution of the Kosovo crisis should be an obligation of the international community.

The Macedonian Government highly appreciates the assistance provided by the international community thus far through certain financial institutions or on a bilateral basis. The assistance should continue, which is to say, we expect States to fully carry out the commitments they have undertaken. This is the right moment to write off parts of our external debts as a recognition of the efforts we are making to overcome the crisis. Today, the only thing that the Republic of Macedonia requests is the fulfilment of the promises made by the international community during the crisis.

Even prior to the outbreak of the crisis and the adoption of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), my country had consistently supported a peaceful and political solution to the Kosovo crisis that would include substantial autonomy within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, respect for the human rights of all living in Kosovo; respect for the inviolability of existing borders; the cessation of hostilities and of repression; the deployment of peace forces; the safe and free return of refugees; the demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and other paramilitary forces; and the economic reconstruction of Kosovo and the region.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts made fully to implement Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). The Republic of Macedonia, in this respect, will continue to support the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and all other international governmental and non-governmental organizations. In this context, I would like to recall that on many occasions the Macedonian Government has demonstrated its readiness closely to cooperate with the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, with his Special Representative, Mr. Kouchner, and with UNMIK, and that it has offered its good offices.

The Republic of Macedonia strongly supports the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe as one of the most important adopted documents for the wider region and for Europe. Furthermore, it is prepared to take an active part in its implementation and to contribute to the reconstruction and stabilization of the region and its speedy integration into European structures. The Stability Pact, through its three pillars, or "working tables", and through the relevant international global and regional institutions, is expected to contribute to a lasting stabilization of the region and to its final integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. To this effect, I would like to call upon all of the parties to this extremely important document to mutually reinforce their activities and to enhance their coordination.

I would here like to underscore the strong interest of the Republic of Macedonia in the prompt implementation of the second pillar for economic development and reconstruction. The most important issue linked with its unimpeded functioning and the realization of the desired results — greater inclusion of the Balkans in European economic, political and democratic trends — is the setting up of lasting mechanisms for the necessary fund-raising and the securing of funds to this end. Many United Nations programmes and activities could be used for this purpose. The Republic of Macedonia is interested in seeing the United Nations play a role in this sphere.

The Republic of Macedonia will propose a pertinent draft resolution at this session of the General Assembly that stresses the importance of the prompt consolidation and development of South-Eastern Europe, the importance of the Stability Pact and the need for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). We are convinced that the draft will be supported by all States Members of the United Nations.

Let us hope that this will be the last crisis in the Balkans or South-Eastern Europe. But to prevent any recurrence of this kind of situation, we will have to defend more successfully democratic principles and values and develop long-term preventive strategies.

I am convinced that the beginning of the next millennium will mark a new era in the history of this area, which has been overburdened with conflicts and therefore needs to focus primarily on its own development and prosperity. In the long run, regional stability can be provided by economic development, democracy, respect of human rights and the rights of national minorities, and bilateral and regional cooperation. However, the best way to guarantee the security of the region and transform it into an area of democracy, development, stability and cooperation is for the countries of the region to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and become fully fledged members.

The Republic of Macedonia is among the countries most affected by the crisis — economically, socially and

politically. This has hampered our efforts to build a society that meets the expectations of our people.

Despite the major challenges it has confronted in the past, my country has managed to implement and advance the strategic commitments set out in its foreign policy: integration in the European Union, inclusion in Euro-Atlantic security structures and development of good-neighbourliness.

The success of that policy is reflected in the fact that the Republic of Macedonia was able to stay out of the four armed conflicts which have taken place in the last decade on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. For the first time in the history of the Republic of Macedonia as an independent country, we have been faced with a war on our borders. In such circumstances, the contribution of the peaceful and constructive Macedonian policy to conflict resolution is highly significant. The Republic of Macedonia is fully committed to carrying out the reforms that have been initiated, based on European standards, in the political, economic and democracy fields, with maximum respect for human rights, including minority rights.

That commitment by the Macedonian Government and the results of the reforms have been commended by the international community. That is precisely why the European Union has decided that the Republic of Macedonia should be the first partner in the commencement of negotiations for the conclusion of the Stability and Association Agreement.

The Republic of Macedonia has a long-term commitment to the continuing improvement of its relations with all of its neighbours. The advancement and development of these relations, as well as of bilateral cooperation with all of its neighbours, is evidenced by intensive cooperation in the framework of a number of regional initiatives. Two trilateral meetings have taken place among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria and Greece, the aim of which was to coordinate and promote activities aimed at a more successful implementation of the Stability Pact.

I would like to emphasize that the policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, elected less than a year ago, is aimed in particular at improving, as soon as possible, the situation in the region. To this effect, many practical steps have been taken, which to our mutual satisfaction are yielding results.

As we approach the new millennium, the last session of the General Assembly for this century is undoubtedly the forum best suited to evaluating what has been achieved in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms. Over the last 50 years, impressive progress has been made in international humanitarian law. Today, we are proud to note that the United Nations, having adopted the fundamental Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has managed to affirm the international consensus on the basic postulates of human dignity and to promote them as a basic standard and objective to be attained by all individuals and nations.

Of no less importance is the promotion and strengthening of all United Nations human rights bodies engaged in the protection and promotion of human rights, including minority rights. In this regard, the Republic of Macedonia supports the reform of the mechanisms and functioning of the United Nations bodies in this area.

This year we mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although this Convention has been ratified by almost all States, its genuine implementation is still a desired aim. A large number of children are still victims of disrespect for their fundamental rights. We therefore fully and firmly support the efforts made at this year's session of the Commission on Human Rights to undertake concrete measures for the protection of the rights of the child, the aim of which is to promote the next century as the century of the universal protection of the rights of the child.

The role and efforts of the international community in the full implementation of currently accepted standards and principles are important, but the primary role and responsibility lies with the States themselves. As is evident from the democratic development of my country, the Republic of Macedonia completely associates itself with the endeavours of the international community for the observance and promotion of human rights.

In the twenty-first century the maintenance of international peace and security all over the world should be the priority aim of our Organization. As the Secretary-General stated in his report, the world, and our Organization in particular, will be faced with the need to be fully involved in the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts and with the development of the affected States. The elimination of poverty and reducing the gap between the developed and developing countries

should be our priorities, as my colleagues have already said. In the next century the Republic of Macedonia would like to see an improvement in economic development and international economic cooperation, as well as an enhancement of efforts being made within the disarmament process and greater support for them.

We may note that the global community has achieved significant improvements with regard to living standards and the reduction of poverty. The global economy is showing modest but constant growth of 2 per cent annually, while the volume of trade is continuing to increase. However, it seems that, irrespective of the important accomplishments, the world community is confronted with a series of alarming problems that must be resolved.

Increased world poverty and unemployment are key problems, which should be the main preoccupation of the international community, the aim being to eliminate them. Half the population of the world lives on less than $3 per capita per day, while the unemployment rate is increasing continuously; the international community has to face the challenge of overcoming that situation. Decisions of the international community regarding international economic policies are most frequently made in the United Nations framework. The Governments of the developed countries have a leading role to play and the primary responsibility in this domain.

The indebtedness of the developing countries and countries in transition is mainly a result of inappropriate political circumstances, in the form of armed conflicts; different types of embargoes and factors make it impossible for them to market their goods; and natural disasters. Writing off the debts, or part of the debts, of the countries affected by objective external factors would have a very positive impact on diminishing global poverty and unemployment and on economic development. Only the economically developed and independent State can be truly politically independent and sovereign and have a role to play in the international community.

Globalization of the world economy and liberalization of world trade are necessary preconditions for the improvement of living standards and the reduction of existing differences in countries' development relative to global development. The role of the United Nations in this area is of great importance. The increased globalization and liberalization of the world economy should be accompanied by a lowering of existing barriers and by facilitating the free transfer of goods and services and of the work force. This would create a unified world economy in its true meaning.

In the next century more attention will be placed on the observance of the United Nations Charter. In the interests of the maintenance of international peace and collective security, it is extremely important that Security Council decisions be made on behalf of all the Member States of our Organization, without its being possible for them to abuse the right of veto. The contribution of the Republic of Macedonia to the promotion of peace and security is well known, and this was confirmed by the deployment on its territory of the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), which was unfortunately terminated at the moment when the region may have been most in need of it.

The importance of the leading role played by this single universal Organization is reflected in its skill in adapting to real situations and practical problems. I am deeply convinced that the new challenges are already reflected in the manner of operation of our Organization and in its structure. I would like to salute the firm determination to continue to implement United Nations reforms, which have already produced results, as stated in the Secretary-General's report. The Republic of Macedonia is of the opinion that the reform of the United Nations system will be successful only if reform of the Security Council is followed by reform of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

We expect the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly to successfully conclude preparations for the organization of the Millennium Assembly in the year 2000. In this context, we are anticipating with great interest the Secretary-General's report. At the same time, we join the appeal for all Member States to be represented by heads of State or Government at that event.

United Nations Member States must constantly contribute to the strengthening of the basic democratic values of peace, security, stability, social and economic development, respect for international law and respect for human and minority rights. The United Nations is the true place for the improvement of these basic values. The resolution of each country to persist in that way is of crucial importance in determining whether we will jointly manage to fully implement these commitments and enjoy the fruits of development.

I would like to assure the Assembly that the Republic of Macedonia has already embarked on that road and will continue to make its contribution to the full implementation of those values.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

I remind members that, in accordance with decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to respond to the distortion of facts in the statement of the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait. First of all, he spoke of the imposition of sanctions as a successful way to settle issues. We believe that the sanctions against Libya and against Iraq have resulted in humanitarian disasters. The Kuwaiti minister ought to read the latest report prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which shows that to date 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five have died as a result of the sanctions. He has forgotten the international condemnation of those sanctions; he has also forgotten the view of the present Secretary-General and his predecessor that experience has shown sanctions to be a limited weapon that sometimes misses its target and causes disastrous harm to civilians.

The sanctions against Iraq constitute a crime of genocide. If the Kuwaiti minister believes that this is why the sanctions are successful, then he is correct.

Secondly, the Kuwaiti minister summarized in his own way the conclusions reached by Ambassador Amorim. No matter what we may think of those reports, the conclusions of the Kuwaiti minister were presented in the style of the United States: in an excessively selective way. He ignored the well known fact that the former United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) was a tool used for spying on Iraq on behalf of the United States of America, the zionist entity and the United Kingdom. The fact that UNSCOM itself destroyed documents as well as samples of the VX it had used to contaminate missiles in Iraq proves the Commission's lack of professionalism. UNSCOM was a black mark on the history of the United Nations and an affront to its role in the field of verification. In a recent report, the Secretary-General himself confirmed that reports of spying by UNSCOM were, to some extent, true.

There must be no false statements based on false accusations: all the conclusions of UNSCOM are mere lies intended to perpetuate the sanctions against Iraq.

Thirdly, the matter of missing Kuwaitis is a humanitarian issue that Kuwait has been exploiting for its own cheap political purposes. The existence of missing persons is one of the negative consequences of any conflict. There are 600 missing Kuwaitis, and more than 1,000 missing Iraqis. We call upon Kuwait to cooperate regarding the fate of missing Iraqis.

Fourthly, we take note of Kuwait's support for the draft resolution put forward by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. That is no surprise to us, and we affirm to the Kuwaiti minister and to others that it is high time for lifting the sanctions against Iraq, for halting interference in its internal affairs, and for putting an end to the aggression against it. If the minister really wants to achieve security and stability in the region, he must end Kuwait's participation in the daily aggression against Iraq in the no-fly zones. Daily aggression by the United States and the United Kingdom in the no-fly zones constitutes use of force against an independent State without Security Council authorization. That is a substantive violation of the Charter, of international law, and of Security Council resolutions calling for respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Iraq.

Because of its participation in the no-fly zones, Kuwait should be the last to speak of the implementation of Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I regret that at this late hour I must exercise my right to reply to the statement of the representative of Iraq, and I shall try to be brief. First of all, I fully reaffirm what my Minister of State for Foreign Affairs said in his statement earlier today. Secondly, with respect to the comments made by the representative of Iraq about the various negative aspects and results of the sanctions, we do not differ with him concerning the impact of the sanctions. But such sanctions are imposed on countries that violate international law and the provisions of the United Nations Charter, and as we all know Iraq violated international law and the sovereignty of other States by occupying the State of Kuwait in 1990.

On 6 August 1990, the Security Council adopted its resolution 661 (1990), by which it imposed comprehensive sanctions on the Iraqi regime. But Iraq did not respond to decisions of international legitimacy. This lack of response obliged the Security Council, through the alliance, to use military force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Regrettably, nine years later Iraq has still not complied with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

With respect to my Foreign Minister's reference to the three evaluation panels, of which the representative of Iraq spoke in his statement, we did not quote the conclusions of the panels, but cited the results of their work and made note of two facts: that Iraq, though invited to do so, has not participated in the panel meetings; and that all the panels concluded that Iraq has not fully complied with the resolutions of the Security Council. We all know that the Security Council is now considering various draft resolutions aimed at finding a way to convince Iraq to resume its cooperation with the United Nations and to implement Security Council resolutions, and at then looking into the question of lifting the sanctions.

With reference to the issue of missing persons and prisoners of war, we have grown accustomed to Iraq's attempts to falsify the facts. It has become tedious to respond to those lies and falsifications. The representative of Iraq believes that Kuwait is using the issue of missing persons and prisoners of war for its own "cheap purposes". But the fact is that Kuwait agreed some years ago to meet with Iraq for purely humanitarian purposes: this is solely a humanitarian matter. Many meetings were held, with and without Iraq. Initially, Iraq refused to sit with the trilateral committee convened under Red Crescent auspices; two years later, it began to participate.

But it used these meetings for propaganda purposes. As of last January, Iraq stopped participating in these meetings, which are considering humanitarian issues only. It stopped for political purposes, stating that the countries of the Alliance have no right to attend. Iraq discovered that only after the passage of a few years.

The representative of Iraq claimed that his country has fulfilled all the conditions of these Security Council resolutions, that it has fulfilled the resolutions concerning the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Here we have to ask, is the whole international community mistaken and Iraq alone right?

The 5 permanent members of the Security Council and the 10 non-permanent members have for the last nine years affirmed repeatedly that Iraq has not fulfilled its obligations in accordance with Security Council resolutions, either in the area of arms of mass destruction or in the area of repatriation of prisoners of war and property. Furthermore, there are regional organizations that are calling upon Iraq to continue to fulfil its obligations, including the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and many other regional organizations.

The Government of Iraq knows very well that it will see the light at the end of the tunnel if it implements the resolutions of international legitimacy rather than continuing to stall and procrastinate about them. We hope that Iraq will understand the lessons of the past and will pursue a rational and peaceful policy based on respecting the principles of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries and good neighbourly relations. In this way the countries and the peoples of the region, including the Iraqi people, can find the strength and the ability to bring about progress and development for their countries.

The Acting President: *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now call on the representative of Iraq, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I will try to be brief. Iraq has implemented everything that is required of it by the resolutions of the Security Council, but the Security Council has not done what it should have, because there is a secret American political programme against Iraq. Everybody knows that that political programme against Iraq is aimed at changing the Iraqi regime, bringing in a stooge government, dividing Iraq and prolonging a destabilized situation.

Iraq has done what has been requested of it, and has challenged the United Nations Special Commission several times to give the international community one piece of evidence about prohibited weapons, activities or *materiel*. It has failed. It should have implemented paragraphs 21 and 22 of resolution 687 (1991), concerning the lifting of the sanctions. But this has not been done because of American hegemony over the Security Council.

Concerning the subject of the missing, Iraq participated very seriously in the trilateral committee, and during these meetings Kuwait submitted the names of 7,000 missing, then it reduced the number to 2,500. Finally, during the meetings of the committee, the

number fell to only 600. All these individual files have been resolved with complete cooperation by Iraq. I do not know why the United States and Britain insist on participating in these meetings when they have no missing persons or prisoners of war. France does not participate and has no objection to not participating.

As regards international legitimacy, under the American hegemony over the Security Council, the issue is laughable. Most of the international community does not favour the genocide being committed against the Iraqi people. Most of the international community wants to lift the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Only the United States wants to continue these sanctions.

The meeting rose at 8.25 p.m.